

ACTIVIST AGENDA

April 2004

April 1 to 3: CHILDREN AND WAR: IMPACT is a conference that focuses on the need to protect children from war and to rehabilitate those who become victims of armed conflict. Visit <http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/childrenandwar/> for more information.

April 4th, Sunday @ 5:00 - 6:00 pm: Nature of Things presents **THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD** - a one-hour documentary that unveils obesity as the first man-made epidemic the world has experienced. Location: CBC Television. <http://www.cbc.ca/natureofthings/schedule.html>

April 12th, Monday @ 9:00 pm: Public Broadcasting System (PBS) will be airing a documentary based on the life of **EMMA GOLDMAN**. For more information, check out: <http://www.pbs.org/wqbn/amex/goldman/> for more information.

April 15th, Thursday @ 7-9pm: Boreal Action Team and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society present **KEEP OUR FORESTS ALIVE!** Alberta's boreal forest is under attack, and the time to act is now! Location: Community Room 221A, second level Bonnie Doon Mall. For more information contact: Lisa at 432-0967, lisa-cockburn@cpaws-edmonton.org.

April 16th, Friday @ 9:00 pm - 10:00 pm: CBC Ideas airs **"THE IDEAS OF DAVID SCHINDLER"**. Dr Schindler (University of Alberta) is one of Canada's most celebrated scientists (he recently won \$1 million for lifetime achievement) talks about his lifelong work on water. For more information, check out: <http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/schedule1.html>

April 18th, Sunday @ 7:00 pm EDMONTON COALITION AGAINST WAR AND RACISM meeting. ECAWAR meets to plan protests and resistance actions, including ongoing work to stop the US-led Ballistic Missile Defense program. Location: Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (use courtyard doors on north side of building) - 10010 - 107a Avenue. Contact 988-2713 for more information and/or visit our website at www.ecawar.org

April 18th, Sunday @ 5:30pm: **VEGETARIANS OF ALBERTA MONTHLY POTLUCK SUPPER** at Parkallen Community Hall, 11104 - 65 Avenue. \$2 members and \$3 non-members. Please bring a lacto-ovo or vegan dish for six and your cutlery and crockery. Also FREE vegetarian cooking class starting at 4pm prior to the potluck - same place and day. Visit www.telusplanet.net/~voo or call 988-2713 for more information.

April 22nd, Thursday @ 6:30 pm: Documentary on Genetically Modified foods **DECONSTRUCTING SUPPER**. Location: Metro Cinema, Zeidler Hall - main floor of the Citadel Theatre Complex (9828-101A Avenue). Admission: \$8 Adults and \$6 Students/Seniors.

April 22nd, Thursday @ 6:30 pm: **TOOKER GOMBERG - A VIDEO MEMORIAL**. Location: Metro Cinema, Zeidler Hall - main floor of the Citadel Theatre Complex (9828-101A Avenue). Admission: \$8 Adults and \$6 Students/Seniors

April 23rd, Friday @ 9:00 pm - 10:00 pm: CBC Ideas presents **DISPOSABLE PEOPLE**. This is a broadcast of a human rights lecture from the University of Alberta by Kevin Bales, Director of Free the Slaves, and author of Disposable People, that reveals the modern face of slavery.

April 22nd, Thursday @ 7:30 pm: Public meeting regarding the building of a large Wal-Mart on 50th Street and 90th Avenue. There will be an

"open house" from 5:30 to 7:30. There will be three or four stations set up where the public can view display boards and ask one on one questions to the applicant, transportation, planning department, etc. A formal public meeting and presentation will start at 7:30. Location: The King's University College - Atrium (9125 - 50 Street). Contact:

April 23rd, Friday and April 24th, Saturday: Join Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) for the second annual **SPIN AROUND THE CLOCK** Fundraiser. From 6pm April 23 until 6pm April 24, West Edmonton Mall's Ice Palace will be filled with hundreds of stationary bikers working up a sweat with a purpose. All proceeds support the Livia Stoyke Foundation, WIN House and the Edmonton Chapter of CPAWS. Contact: Trevor at 430-7953 postmaster@livia.ca or visit www.livia.ca for more information.

April 25th, Sunday @ 12 noon to 6 pm: Come and partake in the **15TH ANNUAL EARTH DAY FESTIVAL**. Location: Hawrelak Park (Mayfair Park). Admission: Free. Contact: 460-1756 or visit www.earthday.ca for more information about the celebrations across Canada.

April 26th, Monday @ 7:15-9pm: Boreal Action Team and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society present **KEEP OUR FORESTS ALIVE!** Alberta's boreal forest is under attack, and the time to act is now! Location: Mountain Equipment Co-op (124 street and 102nd Avenue). For more information, contact: Lisa at 432-0967, lisa-cockburn@cpaws-edmonton.org

April 28th - MAY 8th: MAYWEEK LABOUR ARTS FESTIVAL - lots of events happening. Check out <http://mayweek.ab.ca>

May 1st, Saturday @ 1.00 p.m. - 2:30 pm: To launch the Pesticide Free Lawns Campaign in Edmonton a presentation and discussion panel entitled **PESTICIDES, POLITICS AND HEALTH** featuring Helen Jones and Dr. David Swann. Location: Stanley A. Milner Library, 7 Sir Winston Churchill Square. Contact: Sierra Club at 439-1160 or visit <http://prairie.sierraclub.ca/>
May 1st, Saturday @ 3:00 p.m. - 4:30 pm: As part of the Pesticide Free Lawns Campaign in Edmonton there will be a **GREEN THUMB/GREEN PLANET** workshop featuring author and activist Carole Rubin Location: Stanley A. Milner Library, 7 Sir Winston Churchill Square. Contact: Sierra Club at 439-1160 or visit <http://prairie.sierraclub.ca/>

May 14th - 16th - PEOPLE AND THE PLANET CONFERENCE LOCATION: SAIT Campus - Calgary, Alberta. Contact: Sierra Club of Canada www.sierraclub.ca for more information

Check out the Earth Charter: <http://www.earthcharter.org/>

In Memory: You can make a donation to celebrate the life of the late Tooker Gomberg. These donations will help continue the work that he lived. There are two funds: Tooker Gomberg Activist Fund (non-charitable) and Tooker Gomberg Greenspiration Fund (charitable). Cheque may be mailed to P.O. Box 1242, Place de Parc Station, Montreal, QC, H2X 4A7. More information may be found at www.greenspiration.org

"When cooperation involves sin, non-cooperation becomes the highest duty."

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869 - 1948)

If you know of an upcoming activist event that should be listed here please email Michael at egs@interbaun.com or contact Earth's General Store at 439-8725.

OUR VOICE

APR 2001
OUR VOICE
e-towns most progressive mag

OUR VOICE

OUR VOICE
THE SPARECHANGE MAGAZINE
A voice to think

looking back + moving on
7 yrs on the street

Real People
JULY 2002

home is where the car is
jul 2001

Spare Change
Sold By People With No Spare Change

TEN YEARS 1994 - 2004 on the STREET

Price Negotiable
April 1994
Vol. 1 Issue 1

Sold by donation - Your vendor pays 50C per copy - Buy from yellow badged vendors only

<PUBLISHER>
Bissell Centre, Edmonton

<MANAGING EDITOR>
Warren Bjarnason

<DESIGN & PRODUCTION>
Pieter de Vos, Jr.
pdevos@bissellcentre.org

<PUBLIC RELATIONS & DISTRIBUTION>
Ron MacLellan

<PROOFREADER>
Flavio Hyphenuss

<CARTOONIST>
Eric Uhlich

<COVER>
Pieter de Vos, Jr.

EDITORIAL OFFICES & EDMONTON DISTRIBUTION:

Bissell Centre, 10527-96 Street,
Edmonton, Alberta, T5H 2H6
Phone: 423-2285 Ext. 162
Fax: 429-7008
wbjarnason@bissellcentre.org

OUR VOICE is published to provide an income opportunity for economically marginalized people in our society while communicating their issues to the public.

OUR VOICE is a NON-PROFIT program that survives on vendors advertising contributions and Tax Deductible Donations.

If you have any concerns about vendor behavior call our distribution team at:
#423-2285 Ext. 139

ADVERTISING

For advertising rates and related information, please contact
Ron @ 423-2285 Ext. 139

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VOL. 11 NO. 04**

OUR VOICE invites your contributions and input.

Letters sent to the editor are assumed to be for publication, unless otherwise indicated.

OUR VOICE welcomes written submissions (particularly those on PC compatible diskettes), cartoons, photographs or artwork.

OUR VOICE cannot accept responsibility for any submission. No part of this newspaper may be reproduced in any form without written permission from OUR VOICE.

Opinions expressed in this newspaper are not necessarily those of OUR VOICE, the editors or publishers.

OUR VOICE is a member of the North American Street Newspaper Association (NASNA).

THE WORD

Kicking Ass for a Whole Decade

For any magazine to last 10 years in a world of e-zines, satellite television, blackberries and massive amounts of information at your fingertips is a miracle in itself. It makes it all the more incredible that Our Voice, a street paper, has been around for a full decade. This milestone also illustrates that we offer a picture of Edmonton that is not available elsewhere.

Our Voice is the social conscience of Edmonton and has been since we started as Spare Change in 1994. Over 2000 people have sold Our Voice on the sidewalks of Edmonton since its inception; developing people skills, self-confidence and a taste for the healthy lifestyle. They also work hard to earn some extra money. We started out of necessity back in 1994 when provincial and federal government cuts to social programs pushed more people than ever before out of their homes and onto the streets.

In a perfect world, magazines like Our Voice would not be necessary; neither would soup-lines, food banks, addiction centres or any of the other invaluable resources run by overworked and under-funded agencies in inner-city neighbourhoods and small towns everywhere. Thank God they exist, but it's a first place.

So, how has Our Voice managed to stick around against all odds for such a long time? The most important reason is the relationship Our Voice vendors have with their regular customers. Most copies of Our Voice are sold to socially conscious people like yourself who buy a copy from their favourite vendor every month. People like their vendors and are loyal to their regular guy or lady. Our Voice exists primarily for the vendors, so that they, and others with the same lot in life, can tell their stories and make a

"The other reason for our survival is that we have remained relevant. We give you stories written by or about people in the inner-city."

buck standing in all sorts of weather selling our paper.

The other reason for our survival is that we have remained relevant. We give you stories written by or about people in the inner-city. The interest is generated by a real concern for people living in poverty and having that voyeuristic insight into their lives. We follow stories that just are not going to make it onto the news very often. The fact that some low-income people have been suddenly made homeless, or that people are dying in the cold of winter, are not really considered news; they are just things that everyone should know about.

Our Voice would like to thank our readership for your years of love and support. We hope we'll be around for another ten years, but we also wish that we didn't need to be.

- Warren Bjarnason



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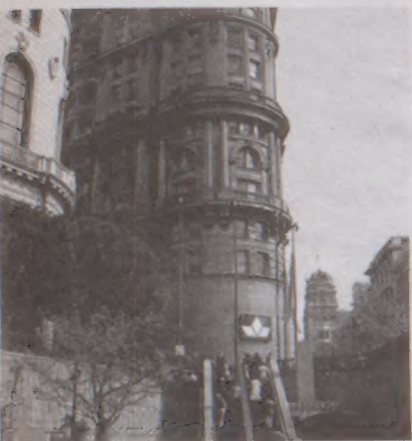
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Book of Days: This Month in History



April 11

Lord Byron to Thomas Moore, from Venice, 1817.

My late physician, Dr Polidori, is here on his way to England, with the present Lord Guilford and the widow of the late earl. Dr Polidori has, just now, no more patients, because his patients are no more. He had lately three, who are now all dead - one embalmed. Horner and a child of Thomas

Hope's are interred at Pisa and Rome. Lord Guilford died of an inflammation of the bowels: so they took them out, and sent them (on account of their discrepancies), separately from the carcass, to England. Conceive a man going one way, and his intestines another, and his immortal soul a third! - was there ever such a distribution? One certainly has a soul; but how it came to allow itself to be enclosed in a body is more than I can imagine. I only know if once mine gets out, I'll have a bit of a tussle before I let it get in again to that or any other.

Francis, fourth Earl of Guilford, had died on 11 January at Pisa. He was the son of Lord North, Prime Minister 1770-81.

April 17

Jack London witnesses the San Francisco earthquake and fire, 1906.

On Wednesday morning at a quarter-past five came the earthquake. A minute later the flames were leaping upward. In a dozen different quarters south of Market Street, in the working-class ghetto, and in the factories,

fires started. There was no opposing the flames. There was no organization, no communication. All the cunning adjustments of a twentieth-century city had been smashed by the earthquake. The streets were humped into ridges and depressions and piled with debris of fallen walls. The steel rails were twisted into perpendicular and horizontal angles. The telephone and telegraph systems were disrupted. And the great water mains had burst. All the shrewd contrivances and safeguards of man had been thrown out of gear by thirty seconds' twitching of the earth crust.

By Wednesday afternoon, inside of twelve hours, half the heart of the city was gone. At that time I watched the vast conflagration from out on the bay. It was dead calm. Not a flicker of wind stirred. Yet from every side wind was pouring in upon the city. East, west, north, and south, strong winds were blowing upon the doomed city. The heated air rising made an enormous suck. Thus did the fire of itself build its own colossal chimney through the atmosphere. Day and night this dead calm continued, and yet, near to the flames, the wind was often half a gale, so mighty was the suck...

Wednesday night saw the destruction of the very heart of the city. Dynamite was lav-

ishly used, and many of San Francisco's proudest structures were crumbled by man himself into ruins, but there was no withstanding the onrush of the flames. Time and again successful stands were made by the fire fighters, and every time the flames flanked around on either side, or came up from the rear, and turned to defeat the hard-won victory...

At nine o'clock Wednesday evening I walked down through miles and miles of magnificent buildings and towering skyscrapers. Here was no fire. All was in perfect order. The police patrolled the streets. Every building had its watchman at the door. And yet it was doomed, all of it. There was no water. The dynamite was giving out. And at right-angles two different conflagrations were sweeping down upon it...

It was at Union Square that I saw a man offering a thousand dollars for a team of horses. He was in charge of a truck piled high with trunks from some hotel. It had been hauled here into what was considered safety, and the horses had been taken out. The flames were on three sides of the square, and there were no horses... An hour later, from a distance, I saw the truckload of trunks burning merrily in the middle of the street.

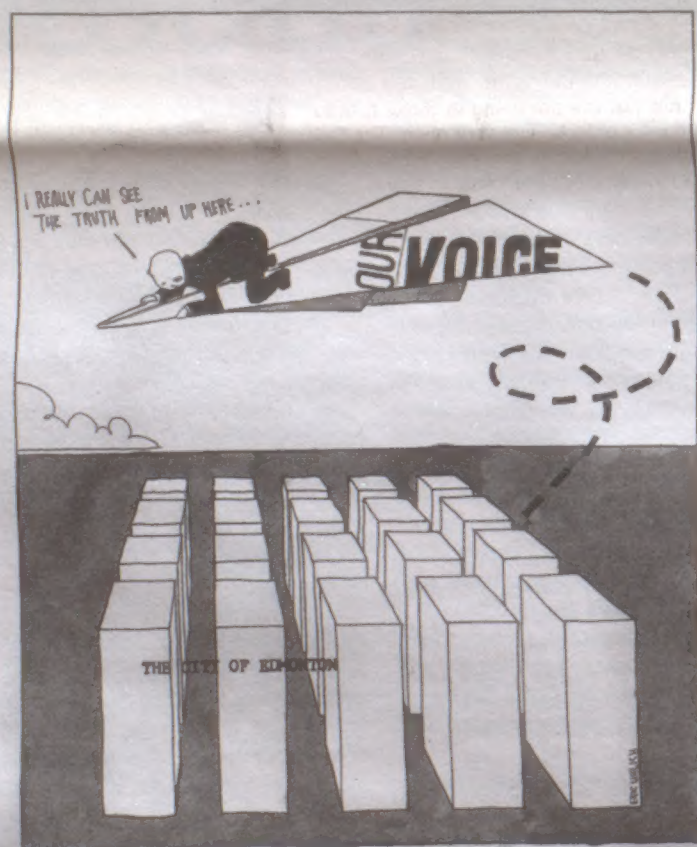
WORD W

WORD: Faculty of speech; locution, talk, parlance, verbal intercourse, prolation [archaic], oral communication, word of mouth, parole, palaver, prattle.

ROGET'S THESAURUS

Advertise to Edmonton

If you have a business or service and would like to reach an educated, socially-conscious segment of Edmonton, try advertising in *Our Voice*. Call Ron at 423-2285 ext. 139 to discuss our reasonable rates.



Our Voice's Ten-Year Anniversary

Our Voice is coming up on its Tenth birthday in April. Like most lucky ten-year-olds, *Our Voice* is going to have a party to commemorate its big day.

Join us at the Sidetrack Café, 10333 - 112th Street on the evening of April 7th for a night of great local bands, special guests and door prizes.

See you there!

Replacements Available for Our Voice 2004 Calendar

Please note that the months of June, November & December of the *Our Voice Urban Exposure* Calendar contain printing errors.

Replacement calendars are now available from *Our Voice*.

For more information, please contact Ron at: 423-2285 Ext. 139.

We apologize for the inconvenience.

THE VERDICT

V

VERDICT

Decision, determination, finding, **verdict**, sentence, decree; opinion (belief); good judgment (wisdom)

ROGET'S THESAURUS



On Film *The Passion of the Christ*

The novelist Anne Tyler wrote that Jesus is "an itchy word", makes one squirm a bit, look the other way, a burr on the lungs. Imagine you're in a Starbucks, a bookstore, or bus and the people next to you begin a reverent conversation about the teachings of Christ. It has happened and I, like everyone else, shifted uneasily, felt vaguely insulted and strangely put upon. Why? I can only answer for myself. I want my relationship with Jesus to be my love story — intimate, private, healing — but fear I'll have to declare myself at some point, come out of the closet and be hated by The World. Great. The prospect of being rolled in the thick tempura of unfashionable belief and then deep-fried in derisive Christian stereotypes holds little joy for me. I'll be "out" as a card-carrying member of the geek-hood, milquetoast and meek of spirit, narrow-minded, sexually-insipid, pitifully lobotomized by party-pooping doctrines — oh, happy day. I observe that the dogmatic yammering of political correctness blows hard for everyone but the Christian — why? Popular culture typically projects any heretical perversion of Christian belief (e.g. racism, violence, exclusion) as the norm when I've only ever known it to be the exception — why? These scattered thoughts are leading up to a review of a movie that makes no difference how it's reviewed: Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. What does it profit a reviewer to gain an opinionated column but lose his/her influence? Reviewers can "toss their heads and curl their lips" in scornful chorus but The

Passion has made \$300 million in 4 weeks. This surprising blockbuster status has been explained away by the billowing black smoke of controversy surrounding it and Mel's marketing, often viewed as the same thing. One commentator posited that Gibson himself lit the first fire of the movie's alleged anti-Semitism because blazing notoriety is damn good for business (pun intended). Son of God or not, it's just showbiz savvy and Mel's full of it. But this was not what I saw, especially after the second viewing when I was better prepared for the interminable brutality. Yes, the movie is flawed (the part with the raven and the bad thief laughably so) and it's bloody, but that's not what stayed with me. Not that at all. There were many moments of pure cinematic art — I was transported right inside a mystical Rembrandt, a Caravaggio lived and breathed, Mary had the serenity of a Vermeer. There was also the macabre rictus of Bosch, Grünewald's gross disquiet and even some of Schiele's bleakness. But again, it was the beauty that resonated and remained.

The actor who plays Jesus (James Caviezel) is a beautiful man, not just physically; he possesses a magnetism and an other-worldly stillness. He seems very kind. I was told the illuminated brown-gold of his eyes was digitized and he was fitted with a more ethnically authentic nose, but it's the "depth and passion of his earnest glance" that clinch the deal. Caviezel and the cinematography imprinted many recurring images on my memory; something I haven't experienced since *The Two Towers* and *Punch Drunk Love* — a rare and radiant treasure, manna for one's interior life. All the other actors only glow dimly in Caviezel's reflected light, as it should be, with the exception of the manic and porcine Herod (some obscure Italian actor), who had excellent but short-lived presence. Also, Pontius Pilate (Hristo Shopov) was solid — a subdued and pensive Mussolini. I found the actress

who played Mary rather bland but am quickly reproached by everyone I voice this to. The relationship between mother and son is a prism through which all light is refracted in this particular rendering of Christ's last days on earth. I, personally, was impressed with the Satan figure (played by a woman, has the voice of a man and looks completely androgynous) and found the creature successfully creepy and menacing.

The only flaw of this movie is the recurring intrusion of Hollywood tactics and sensibilities, but Mel Gibson is who he is. Still, there's a transcendent quality because the subject is what it is. It's a many-layered product, its foundation on such disparate almost inimical crossroads — modern Hollywood and Jesus. Once, this union was far from strange, but that was many, many moons ago.

I have no illusions that my ex-post facto movie reviews tip any scales as to whether someone will see a movie or not, but I've never reviewed anything that made me feel so irrelevant. It seems like all the opinions of this movie are just so many dust motes in the path of a juggernaut. It reminds me of the Palm Sunday reading where the Pharisees tell Jesus to silence the crowd that's cheering and praising him. He replies "Even if these are silent, the stones will cry out". This movie and its attending phenomena really brought this moral home for me; i.e., whether we mortals accept or reject the claim of Christ's life, the unseen architecture of human destiny won't be altered a jot. So, see it if you want to or don't and take from it what you want or don't. My rating is some arbitrary, mystical number out of some other arbitrary mystical number. To paraphrase: "...it doesn't take much to see that the words of a thousand little reviewers don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world." Amen.

—Keyna Laurence

Would you like to tell your story to Edmonton?

Are there things that happened to you that you think negatively affect others as well?

Should other people know what's going on?

Send your story to

wbjarnason@bissellcentre.org

or come see the

Our Voice

editor at the
Bissell Centre,
10527 - 96th
Street.

Let your voice be heard!

THE RHUBARB



Crossroads

I will tell you what happened on a raw day in Edmonton city centre, at the end of February. I had had my hair cut, very short, and was now walking eastwards, to Canada Place, where I knew I could get a passport photo taken. As I approached the corner of 100 St. and 102 Ave., I saw a man, a beggar, propped against a column outside the CBC building. A tall cane was leaning against the column behind him. The man was sitting, or half-crouched, his legs oddly folded up beneath him, yet it seemed also that one leg stretched away at an angle that didn't seem quite right.

But it was his face that arrested the attention of passersby. So much so that most of them were frowning with the effort not to look. His skin seemed unnaturally smooth, and slightly yellow. His nose was a small elongated trunk, attached just above his upper lip. He sat quietly, looking straight ahead at the edge of the curb, holding out a styrofoam cup. I approached him in profile. The grey light of the day shone clear between his face and nose.

My heart started beating faster too with the effort of looking, not looking. I thought, I don't have any money. And besides, my wallet is in my knapsack. I would have to stop and fumble for it. I stood at the intersection, waiting for the light to change. A woman beside me turned around and stared with open curiosity, trying (like me, who dared not to look) to figure out the face.

I walked away, but the presence of the man would not leave me. I walked up and down the atrium in Canada Place, looking for the small shop which does passport photos. A young native man sat on a bench nearby, bent over a secret task. He was furtively harvesting cigarette ends from an ashtray. His coat looked as if he had slept on the floor of a carpark.

The photos taken, still the man on the

corner would not go. I walked back along Rice Howard Way and, looking north up 100 St., saw him there, still at the intersection, looking mildly ahead, his limbs hanging loosely as if he'd been hung up on a peg.

I walked on quickly, but now a thought came to me with the force of revelation. That man, I understood now, was Jesus. Not like, not a reminder of, but was. My shame, my uncertainty about what to do, was trivial beside this truth. I walked even quicker, but only so I could find somewhere quiet to dig out my wallet. The cash I had did not even amount to a dollar, but the coins made a cheerful clicking in my palm.

I now retraced my steps and headed north to the intersection of 100 St. and 102 Ave. At the end of the vista was Jesus, still, broken. Even so, my heart raced. I feared the passersby, although I cannot say what I thought they might do to me. Closer and closer, I crossed 102 Avenue behind two tough-looking teenagers.

And then I was standing in front of the man and putting the coins in his cup. He looked at me. He had lost one of his eyes, and the back of the eyesocket was visible through his half-closed lid. He spoke with simple friendliness, 'Thank you.' The voice was warm and alert. The slightly yellow skin of his face looked unnaturally smooth, without fault. I wished him a good day and walked on, feeling as if he had shaken my hand.

'If I were a better person,' I thought afterwards, 'I would have gone straight to a bank machine and got something real to put in his cup.' But now I am not so sure. I am not sure whose part it was to give, whose to receive.

- Sylvia Brown

Enrolling into my Working Community

This past year I had the opportunity to take part in the Citizen's Police Academy, Class #3, with the Edmonton Police Service. I want to share with you why I enrolled myself in this 3.5 month weekly class; but, first, I want to provide a bit of background information.

I was raised in a middle-class family in Edmonton and I am the 2nd youngest of four girls. I was taught as a young girl that police are our friends and are there to protect the community. While growing up I never had any dealings with the police other than the ones that would come to talk to the children in the schools about being safe and how to say no to a ride with a stranger.

My first real encounter was when I was stopped for performing an illegal turn with my vehicle shortly after passing my driving exam.

There are many different perceptions of the police but, as my boyfriend would say, I always side with the police, this is not entirely true. I would say that I understand how people may see the police in a slightly negative way. They may have been taken away from their parents by the C.A.R.T. team as a young child from an abusive home, or they may have seen one of their parents or someone they loved being put into a police car not to return for some time or they may have just been out at night with friends until one last drink landed them in a holding cell at the police station overnight.

We are creatures of our experiences and mine have primarily been very good where the police are concerned, but I am aware of people that have been wronged by the police and I tell them to place a formal complaint, or if they have been discriminated against by a police officer that this should be communicated to the Police Service just as it should be communicated to any Superior of a person that discriminates.

I do have history with the Police Service as I worked as a Volunteer in a Community Station and in the Victim's Assistance Unit in the past and to be completely honest I even applied to the Police Service shortly after completing my University degree, but I decided that I did not want to be a police officer as much as one should as it is very much a lifestyle choice. I went to Europe instead. I am getting to the whole Citizen's Police Academy enrollment but I think it is important to understand where people are coming from as a result of their perceptions and experiences before we can truly understand why they have the views and opinions they are entitled to.

I am presently employed by Bissell Centre and have been for just over three years. I had never worked in an Inner city agency before, but I find the need is so great and the potential is there for individuals if they just receive support at certain times in their lives. There are moments when you feel deeply honored that someone has let you in to witness a transformation or small success in his or her own life.

I believe that because I do have hope



RHUBARB R

RHUBARB: A discussion, often heated, in which a difference of opinion is expressed:

Altercation, argument, bicker, clash, contention, controversy, debate, difficulty, disagreement, dispute, fight, polemic, quarrel, run-in, spat, squabble, tiff.

ROGET'S THESAURUS

and have worked with some very community-minded police officers that we can all work together. I have connected very well with the beat officers that work near Bissell Centre. We continue to work well together and they ask for our assistance just as we call them weekly to assist us with a safety concern or even just to pick their brain about a situation. The beat officers are part of the Community around Bissell Centre they have built many relationships with the members that come to Bissell Centre and in the surrounding community.

Sooo this is why I decided to take it one step further, this is why I enrolled in the Class #3 with Michele, a colleague of mine. I am a member of this working community so I feel the responsibility to acquire as much knowledge as possible of the Police Service, so that I can utilize their resources and because it seemed like a good forum to share our experiences with the Police, so that they can approach situations that will elicit the best results for the citizens in the community. Class #3 consisted of doctors, lawyers, agency staff, writers, volunteers, retired citizens, those wanting to be police officers, and those wanting to potentially meet a man in uniform.

The class met every Thursday evening and there were usually representatives from two units there to describe their daily routines and to answer any questions we may have had. We also learned about some history and how we are so much better than the Calgary Police Service (this I already knew!) like for instance the Air One pilots are all police officers here in Edmonton but in Calgary they are contracted civilian pilots. There was always food, great banter with the classmates and the police, we met some police dogs, and we were able to handle several different pieces of equipment.

The class members also have the opportunity to be part of an Alumni group that meet periodically to discuss police issues that are of relevance to the community, so that the police have the opportunity to listen to our views as citizens of Edmonton.

The Edmonton Police Service have put a lot of voluntary time and effort into this Academy, and I would like to thank them and assure them that I will continue to assist them when I can as they move further and further into community-minded policing and continue to serve and protect.

- Carolyn Cush

THE RHUBARB



R RHUBARB

WHAT'S UP WITH OUR VOICE?

I want a dish to taste good, rather than to have been seethed in pig's milk and served wrapped in a rhubarb leaf with grated thistle root.

KINGSLEY AMIS



Murray Widerspiel

They are real nice people. Give me a little more money that social assistance doesn't pay me for. And it helps me and that it helps me out and a like meeting people and I meet really nice people doing this.



Betty Norden

Our Voice has given me the opportunity to publish my poetry. By letting my words be shown to the world it has saved me.



Cecil Garfin

From two perspectives, being handicapped and over sixty on a fixed income. And the guaranteed monthly income not increasing there has been a need for extra income. Our Voice is a good way to increase that income. It also has been great over the years. I started with Our Voice when it was first created ten years ago. Being a writer from day one has given me the chance to write about people and groups like the handicapped, poor and seniors that deserve the attention don't usually get their voice expressed to the media and the public. Also overall, it has been a good information source without religious or political bias.



Ernie Ballindine

I have started out writing poetry and then I am going to sell some papers.



Arron Bishop

Its me and helping myself and other people who are less fortunate and making extra money for ourselves. And not sitting at home worrying about why we don't have a good job and this and that. Lets us meet people and 99 percent of those people are good to talk to. That's why I do it, basically.



Keith McDonald

Lets people know there is a street life newspaper. It's really enjoyable: there are so many good things that I am not sure how to describe them Lets you know what is going on in the street. The outward language we are using is helpful to society and will create a stronger and more well-developed society.

OV Vendors Speak Out!



Kevin Fox

In 2001 I was doing a bit of volunteer work around the Bissel Centre. And I needed some extra money. So I started working for the office cleaning up and organizing stuff. By February I was really short of cash so I decided to start selling papers. This is my job no matter if it's a good day or bad day for selling papers. It all right because I am out there meeting people. It has given me to chance to write.

I've Been Dead!

My last memory before passing out after being stabbed—falling to the floor of the Mustard Seed Church. My next, a surgeon saying to me: "Your lungs have collapsed and we need to insert a tube in your side but have nothing to kill pain." I said, "Go for it." Grabbing an arm or leg on each side of me, I passed out again. My next memory: waking up in an operating room with tubes here and there, hearing one surgeon saying to the other "He sure has a lot of fat around his liver." I don't know if I actually visualized it or saw for real but my stomach was cut wide open.

A nurse was holding my hand and asking me trick questions like, "Is your name John?" I would nod my head from side to side (meaning "no") and then she'd ask, "Is your name Randy?" and I would nod "yes". The next question, "Are you in Calgary?" Again I'd nod "no". "Are you in Edmonton?" I'd nod "yes". "Are you at home?" Nod "no". "Are you in the hospital?" I'd nod "yes". "Are you in pain?" I'd stamp my left foot on the bed for "yes". Then would come medication for pain - lights out. Then again the same questions as before, over and over through the night or wee hours of Christmas Day 2000.

It was around about springtime or early summer 2001 that I had come in contact with the paper Our Voice. Due to reoccurring bouts with my medical condition I desperately needed to supplement my income as support from S.F.I. [Supports For Independence] didn't and could not meet my needs but after meeting with Ron [Our Voice Distribution Coordinator Ron MacLellan] (plus some prior investigation of my own) I became an Our Voice vendor, #0973.

I didn't make selling Our Voice an occupation but it sure helped to fill the financial void. I want to say "Thank you Our Voice, sincerely". Our Voice continues to work for me today when I need to fill that void.

- Randolph Elliott
Vendor #0973

Congratulations OUR VOICE on your "10th" Anniversary



Peter Goldring

Member of Parliament
Edmonton Centre-East
495-3261

THE RHUBARB



James, 42 and Sherri, 51

— So you say you're a coke addict?

— Yah, crack cocaine up till Friday before last when I got myself in detox and cleaned up. It's been 10 days. I'll be starting programs when I get settled. I'm at the Herb Jamieson[sp?] now.

— Ten days. That's great. How do you stay away from drugs? Do you have strategies?

— Meeting people in the programs who have been clean for ten years. Being around people like that.

— Sherri, do you help? (She just smiles. She is content to leave the conversation with James.)

— Yah, and I got Sherri. I've got a super friend, that's for sure. We keep busy. I like to cook. I'd rather cook at home if I had a place. I'm on AISH, but it's hard to get a damage deposit and a month's rent together to get a place, but I'll be getting some money from some music tapes. I've got to get them back; then, I'll sell them.

— You mean, like, cassette tapes? Who, for example?

— Kenny Rogers, Dr. Hook, the Honey Drippers. You know - "Sea of Love"

— No, I don't know that one. (John starts singing it for me.)

— Yah, that's it. (Big smile from Sherri. She chuckles.)

— So, you'll sell them and get a place. Get off the streets. James, do you feel safe on the streets?

— Sure, I know the people and they know me. I'm in the same boat as they are; so they respect me. There's no problem... Maybe sometimes you meet somebody has had one too many bottles of Scope or whatever, but it's okay. Sure, there's some pretty bad fights sometimes.

— What would you like to do when you get clean?

— I'd like to get my driver's license back. I'd work for P.I.N. House giving people rides. Help make their day a little easier. It's tough. But at least nobody starves. No way a person on the street can starve. It's impossible. Too many places where you can get that sandwich.

Hawk Eye, 40

(Hawk Eye's troubles started four years ago. He worked doing oilfield survey when he injured a leg. The work was good - just him and a partner in the outdoors where his agoraphobia wasn't a problem. The injury ended that. Subsequently, with reduced mobility, he was obliged to fit into job situations where he was surrounded by more co-workers. His agoraphobia became an issue and he was prescribed Valium to deal with it, as well as painkillers for his leg. He had to work while under the influence of these drugs. Further job injuries followed. In the past four years, he says he's had five surgeries: two on his legs and three on a broken wrist that's now in a permanent brace. He feels he's not really employable, but is getting screwed around by WCB.)

— You're in a room with a lot of people right now. What about the agoraphobia? Do you need Valium to handle being in here?

— Oh yah.

— You've been on the stuff a while. Are you addicted?

— Oh yah. Oh yah. I was taking the Valium, anti-depressants, pain killers while I was working. I knew it was too dangerous. I got notes from the doctors, all verified, but the WCB gives me shit when I quit. When I was working, like, half to three-quarters of the work is overtime. That's just how it is in the oilfield, but the WCB doesn't give any credit for overtime, so I get compensated for below what I was earning. I get \$24,000 a year now. I've sold my T.V., a Thunderbird, other stuff to get by. The WCB just wants to settle as cheap as possible, and I can't get a lawyer to take my case. No one wants to go up against the WCB. The WCB has screwed around every single one of those guys.

— How does the agoraphobia affect your behaviour?

— Anger. But I'm still a servant of God. I have my own faith, which isn't recognized. It keeps me under control. And I'm impeccably honest.

— You have great verbal skills, too. I've been amazed how many people I interview here are so well spoken.

— Well, that's what happens when you can't afford a lawyer and you have to mess around with the government and the agencies. You learn.

Mario, 43

(John and I have moved on up the street to the Mustard Seed Church where they are providing lunch to 200 or 300 people a day and supper to around 400. That's just after the checks come out. Later in the cycle, the numbers grow. It's all hard to believe. These people, the Bissell, other organizations - they do a fantastic job.)

— So you're from Quebec City, and you've been in Edmonton 16 years?

— Yah, transferred to Edmonton. Yes. Major company. Big, huge company.

— And that was?

— Canadian Armed Forces.

— Aha, that's a pretty big company. Yah.

— Yah, I was in for a lifetime - 20 years. I loved it. Retired and I have a medical leave, too.

— So you have medical and some kind of a pension, too, to get by. Does that make it easy, or is it pretty tough?

— It's kind of easy. But sometimes it's hard. The worst thing that doesn't help is this. [Pointing to his cigarettes] Ten dollars a pack, but I get mine at eight dollars.

— How do you see your life now. You're maybe in your mid-forties?

— Forty three. Born on Dec. 5th. Sagittarius. Find somebody better than Sagittarius - good luck. How I put in a day? Okay, I'm retired. Got a pension. It's okay - no joke. So I love to be helpful. Every Sunday I do volunteer work. I work at the Bissell Centre. I go to the service and after the service we serve lunch, and I've been doing that for five years. They need help. The numbers...a lot more people who need help than a couple of years ago.

— Are there other people like yourself who like to pitch in or is that unusual that you do?

— Some of us, yes, but not that many.

Continued Page 8

RHUBARB R

RHUBARB: A discussion, often heated, in which a difference of opinion is expressed:

Altercation, argument, bicker, clash, contention, controversy, debate, difficulty, disagreement, dispute, fight, polemic, quarrel, run-in, spat, squabble, tiff.

ROGET'S THESAURUS

Four Inner City Interviews

I'm off to the Bissell Centre again this month to do interviews for *Our Voice*. Street people. The jobless. The poorly paid. People on different forms of social assistance. Low income. The mentally and physically handicapped. Throw in, too, a good number who are wrestling with drug addiction or alcoholism. It's the last category that rattles me; has my heart in my stomach. I grew up surrounded by alcoholics — father, uncles on my mother's side, family friends. Do you know euchre? I hate that game. To me, all it means is a kitchen full of drunks. I suppose my past might have toughened me to addicts and alcoholics. It didn't. Whenever I travel through the inner city, I start to shake. So, why am I going? Just a conceit maybe. I fashion myself a social activist.

I was going to take the bus but Hank, a friend, says he can drop me off at the Court House where he'll be appearing as a witness in a child abuse case. Only a short walk from there over to the Bissell, so I accept.

The Case

The case, Hank tells me, involves a woman with four kids a fifth on the way.

All different fathers.

The woman's youngest daughter told Hank, a social worker, that mum's ex-boyfriend, a known sex offender had been abusing her. (a found poem I'd like to lose.)

Hank parks the car. He heads in to testify. I carry on to the Bissell. As I approach the York Hotel, I notice the third floor apartments. A man with a bloated face stares down blankly from where he sits by a curtainless window. He could be forty or he could be seventy. Who knows? You'd have to go up there, not to get closer, but to ask. Distance has nothing to do with it.

I wonder whether I'm being mean or insensitive reporting these stereotypes — the woman with the abused daughter and all the different fathers, the wrecked human in the window - and I don't know. Sometimes the distinction between the stereotypes and reality is just too fine. Maybe I'm just too worn out to think it through, or maybe I'm just a jerk.

On the door at the entrance to the York is a sign: "Knives strictly prohibited. Persons with knives will not be allowed in." The main police station is directly across the street, so I'm betting the York occasionally — frequently? — allows persons with guns in. (That's not a complaint.)

I'm now meeting a steady stream of persons with unsteady gaits who have obviously been allowed in somewhere one time too often - make that "many times" - and I'm trembling again. I'm closing in on the Bissell Centre thinking, "I don't want to be doing this and it's never going to feel any different." I'm thinking, "I've already got my story, such as it is, and I haven't even reached the front door - I really do want to just go back home."

At the *Our Voice* office on the third floor, I pick up a digital camera. I wait outside till John shows up. He'll do the photos. He shows as promised and we go in and down to the common room where people are having sandwiches and coffee and conversations. I could be wrong, but as John and I sit there sipping coffee and trying to psyche ourselves up, I figure he's thinking, "I don't want to be here and it's never going to feel any different." Time to start the interviews. So, I just turn my chair a bit and say (sparing you the preliminaries):

THE RHUBARB



R RHUBARB

What **rhubarb**, senna, or
what purgative drug
Would scour these English
hence?

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

REFLECTING ON OUR VOICE

Our Voice is ten years old. I have only been associated with it since the end of '97. The impact it has had on my life has been so subtle and far-reaching it's actually hard for me to remember what I was like before I became involved. When I started vending is was after a very long and fruitless struggle to get back into the workforce after raising my children on welfare. I had gone to college for two years. I had done the life skills courses. I had applied for the hundreds and hundreds of jobs. I had taken the government to court. I had fought and struggled in every way possible to hang on to my dwelling, my possessions, my family— and I had lost. I had been denied social services benefits and I had no place to live. My children were so mortified by my failures they wanted nothing to do with me. The day I came into the Bissell to buy some papers to sell was a very low point in my life. I didn't last very long that first day either. It was very cold out there in my dress pants. I had to cut that day's selling short to run up to the Bissell store and get some snowmobile pants. I spent the rest of the winter looking like a rather grubby Michelin Man. It didn't do much for my feminine self-esteem.

I did make a very far-ranging decision at that point. I decided to give up. I had done everything people had told me I needed to do to become a productive member of society and it had not worked: so now I was going to do nothing but stand on that street corner and hold up this newspaper to cover as much of my face as possible and see how the universe was going to evolve. I was finished with striving. The open contempt of the passersby lacerated me. The pity was worse. The endless grind to come up with that ten dollars a day I needed for rent and the three dollars and fifty cents I needed for carfare before I could so much as warm my hands around a cup of coffee was very demoralizing.

Day after day I stood there with as much of my face covered as possible and watched the rest of the world rush by. Gradually my spirit came back. When middle-class ladies would walk by with their noses in the air I would silently remark to them: "No need for this disapproval lady, what I'm doing here

is neither illegal or immoral and it is sure as hell is not fattening!" Soon I was saying it out loud. Soon I was writing it in the paper. Soon I was hanging out with the other vendors swapping tales and sharing problems. Eventually I was working in the office as a temp distributor and attending vendor meetings. Then I was attending other meetings. Activist meetings, community animating meetings, conferences, forum— so many people with so many different ideas.

Our Voice gave me an entry to a society that cares about people, about the planet, about the future of the human race. I noticed the people who were harsh and contemptuous first because pain has a way of getting our attention very quickly. It took me longer to realize that the company of the other vendors, the Our Voice office people, the people at the Bissell and conversations with my regular customers gave me pleasure. My relationships with other groups who were concerned about social issues gave me hope. I still did not have a lot of money, but suddenly I had a life.

In looking back over my long and very rewarding relationship with Our Voice I'd have to say the most important thing this paper did for me was get me out there and exposed to the world. I was one of those kids who was very good at hiding. I could always find secluded nooks where adults and other kids could not spot me, and I could do those things the dedicated introvert finds fascinating and engrossing. But that very narrow solitary focus also can hide a bone-deep mistrust of everything in the world. It took a lot to get me out of that shell, and I was glad that Our Voice was there to facilitate the process.

I have no regrets about the decision I made to do nothing and let the universe evolve as it would. I've met some truly unique and fascinating people I would not have come to know any other way. I have been to some places and done some things I would never have had the audacity or nerve to even consider planning or trying if the universe had not opened a door for me. I think I might be learning very late in the day to trust a little. This is a good thing.

- Theresa McBryan

Would you like to
tell your story to
Edmonton?

Are there things
that happened to
you that
you think
negatively affect
others as well?

Should other people
know what's
going on?

Send your story to

wbjarnason@bissellcentre.org

or come see the

Our Voice

editor at the

Bissell Centre,

10527 - 96th

Street.

Let your
voice be
heard!

Continued from Page 7

Dawn

— You wanted to say something about nutrition?

— Yes, well, I studied home economics. I've been a cook and a mother for 20 years, a registered massage practitioner, studied marketing, and I came down here and noticed dark circles under everyone's eyes, and bruises all over their bodies that weren't contusion-oriented bruises - right - there was no broken blood vessels around the bruises or anything like that. That shows there's a lack of iron in the diet, which is usually low protein which is associated with a lack of fresh vegetables, vegetable protein and meat protein...so I went to all the food banks and found that there was very little protein available to any of these people, other than the odd can of tuna, a lot of starch, sub-standard vegetables.

— Is that what you find when you come to eat here at the Mustard Seed?

— No, no, not at all. It's not them that are doing that. It's how Alberta Social Services has things set up. People don't get enough money to buy good food, not enough money to pay the rent, not enough money to do the laundry. They're exhausted so there's not enough time to clean your own home, to get proper sleep. It's like they were doing a deprivation study, and whoever's doing this has a very sick mind.

— You mean the effect on people who are not eating a healthy diet?

— Sure. It's like a deprivation study in schizophrenia research - the lack of protein and iron. They record results, making it look to their children and themselves like it's their own fault. They're given substandard food and housing. Then when they're sick, they feed them drugs.

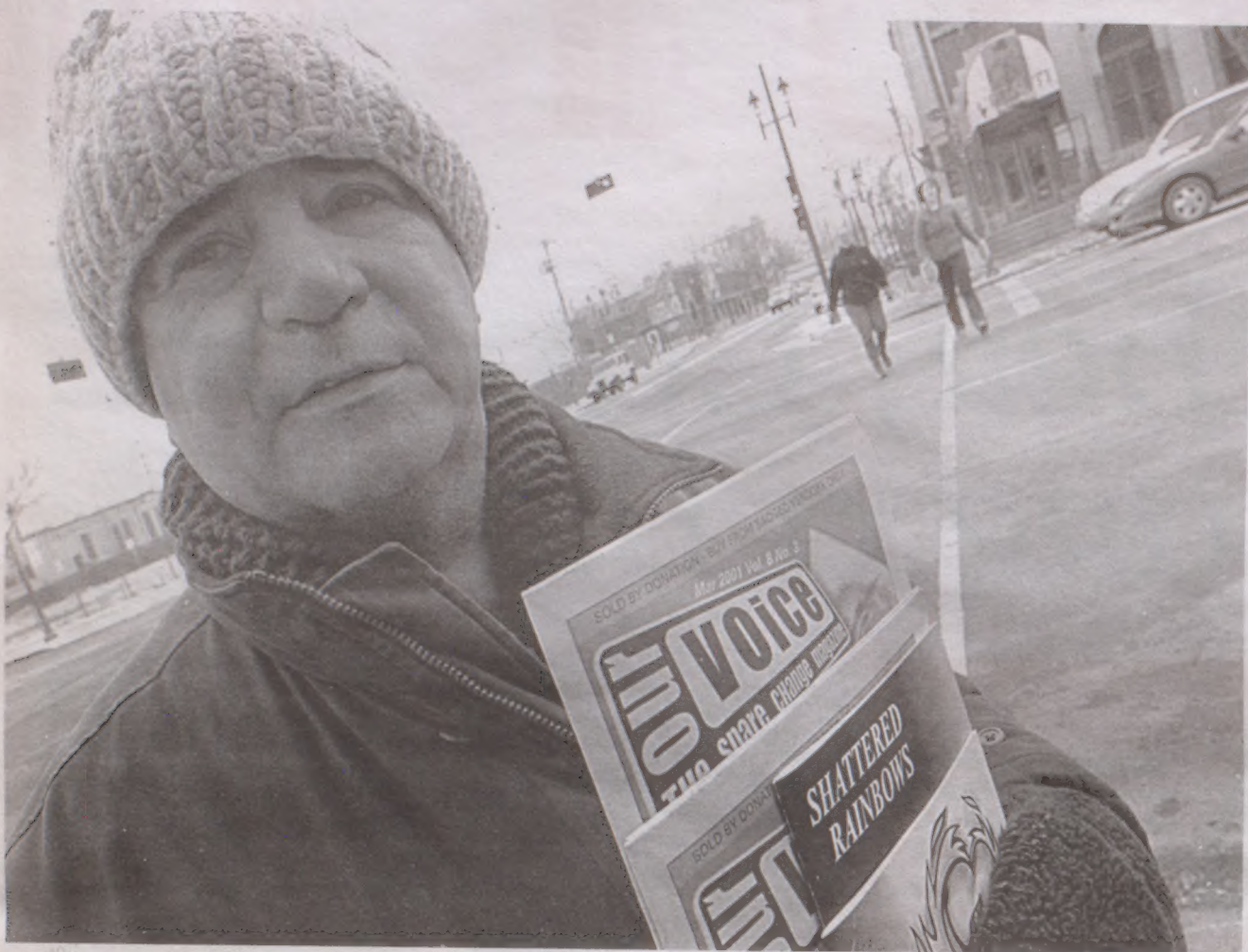
— That's a heckuva story.

— That's the way it is. This is one of the richest provinces in the world. There's absolutely no excuse. No excuse for no protein on the table; no excuse for no laundry. These people are being forced into poor conditions, forced into prostitution rings, forced into criminal behaviour, and as far as I'm concerned you can take your fucking psychiatry over there and ditch it.

So that's it: snippets from four of the interviews I did that day. What's the point? I'm not sure. When I finished all I could think was, "Can I go home now?" And then I thought, "Well, I do have a home to go to, a place where I can get comfort and be safe and stop shaking, like some people can't. And stories are meant to be told." So maybe it's just about allowing people a voice. Maybe it's just about listening, and like a miracle, something comes of it. It is possible, isn't it?

- Fabian Jennings

SCUTTLEBUTT



STREET PAPERS

Let me begin with what should be the mantra of every street newspaper that is sold by low income or street people. Street paper writer and vendor Theresa McBryan articulated this mantra to me:

"Produce a paper not that its publishers think people will want to buy but rather produce a paper that the vendors will want to sell."

Publishers of Street Papers must realize that in order to be a successful project, they must lean on the energy of the vendor, not on the energy of the buyer or consumer. If the publisher approaches this backwards the paper will simply die or only appear to be alive because of glossy paper or sharp covers, but be dead on the inside.

Our Voice, known as Spare Change originally, came to Edmonton in late 1993, mainly as an income opportunity for people being pushed into deeper poverty and on to the streets by Alberta's welfare reform, which was a new government's attempt to lighten its load and "put people back to work, back to personal independence." Around 30,000 people were cut off any government assistance beginning in 1993, with many of them

not able to find work. The birth of the street paper scene in Edmonton was almost completely a reaction to that.

Spare Change's roots were purely economic. People like Larry Derkach, Executive Director of Bissell Centre at the time and Martin Garber Conrad from the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation (E4C) had learned that street people in Vancouver were able to earn their own money by selling a "street paper" on street corners. Due to the economic situation at the time for many people this seemed like a reasonable opportunity to provide for people in difficult economic situations here. On a good day a vendor could make \$30-\$40, enough to pay for a room out of the cold and to afford food, maybe even a hat and gloves warm enough to survive the next day's cold in order to again pay for roof and food. As well for many on fixed incomes that barely covered rent and heat, it provided supplemental money so the disabled and mentally ill could eat.

The street paper project also provides an additional opportunity for people who choose to sell them. That opportunity is in the content of the paper. There is no doubt that street papers are, at their root, economic in what they provide, but of course economics are a construct of our social world. Therefore street papers became havens of a raw social commentary that is often unpublished by anyone else. This commentary ostensibly will be an expression of the social conditions experienced by the people who think selling a street

paper will improve their lot in life.

In the May, 1995 issue, you will find this pull out quote.

"Alberto, VOS, Final Net, Flex Net and Tame," he recites. "Some will get you more high than a kite. Others will just take away your hangover and some will just get you drunk."

Street life is below the radar of the largely middle-class society we have here in Edmonton. What most people know about street life and poverty is communicated to them in the form of sad images of young native kids, old men huddled in rags, and fishnet-stocking adorned women working on street corners. These images are most often provided by non-profit organizations that work with the poor in a legitimate attempt to guilt the afforded middle and upper classes into giving them money so they can keep their doors open.

I believe that most middle-class people are aware of the unfortunate existence of street life, but don't have a clear understanding about what street life has to do with them. Their instincts are to help, so they give money to causes, to agencies and even volunteer from time to time. They, in huge majority, are completely disconnected from street life in any way. They are pretty disengaged from most things. They are rarely even involved in their own children's schools. They are extremely distracted and confused. The average family watches 39 hours of television a week.

We also cannot overlook that many middle-class people are cynical about the poor as well. Part of this cynicism is fueled by the culture of "poverty activists," who often romanticize the poor and blame everyone and everything but the poor for their plights. When poverty activists, who are often not poor themselves, speak out on behalf of the poor they undermine the ability of the poor street person to make their own deals for the betterment of his or herself. They also undermine the real life stories and experiences of the middle-class, many of whom have tremendous struggle and pain in their own lives and family stories.

For most middle-class people, which include poverty professionals and activists, the above quote begins to stir and disturb their view of street life. The quote is part of a story about a man who in the '80s and '90s was considered to be hero on the streets. It is a story about how he and his gang would panhandle so they could get blotto. They got up every morning and masterfully played on people's kindness, spinning all sorts of tales of woe and hardship and how, "if only you gave me a \$1.60 I could get on the bus to my sister's place where I could sleep out of the cold." But then when enough people handed over a \$1.60 enough times they could get blotto.

This story reveals a tension that most people would rather avoid. The tension is one that is defined by letting people off the hook and that of the need for truth. A story like this lets people off the hook by giving them an easy out. "Well, if these Natives just use the money I charitably give them for booze and hairspray then I guess I don't need to give anyone any more money," the middle-class might say. But if we don't tell this story the way it is then we are not really dealing with the truth.

Street papers need to deal with truth by publishing what street people write. Street papers can facilitate a synthesis from the struggle and confusion street people have about their own stories and situations to an arrival at the truth about why they are on the street, and what it will take for them to gain what they need to gain.

Street people need to tell their own stories, be the leaders in their own battles, on and off the street. Street papers give street people a small public place to do these things with some accountability.

It is an incredible feat that Our Voice has survived for 10 years and one that all involved should be proud of. The Bissell Centre should be applauded for its courage in continuing to publish Our Voice each month. It has demonstrated a commitment to its Methodist roots of social justice and people fighting to improve things that matter to them. Our Voice is a great project and I have been blessed by its impact on my life.

- Michael Walters

Michael Walters is currently a Community Organizer in Central Edmonton. He worked as the Distribution Coordinator and Managing Editor of Our Voice Magazine for 6 years, as well as serving on the Executive Committee of the North American Street Newspaper Association for 4 years.

SCUTTLEBUTT S

SCUTTLEBUTT: blab, gossip, noise, rumor, talk, tattle, whisper

ROGET'S THESAURUS

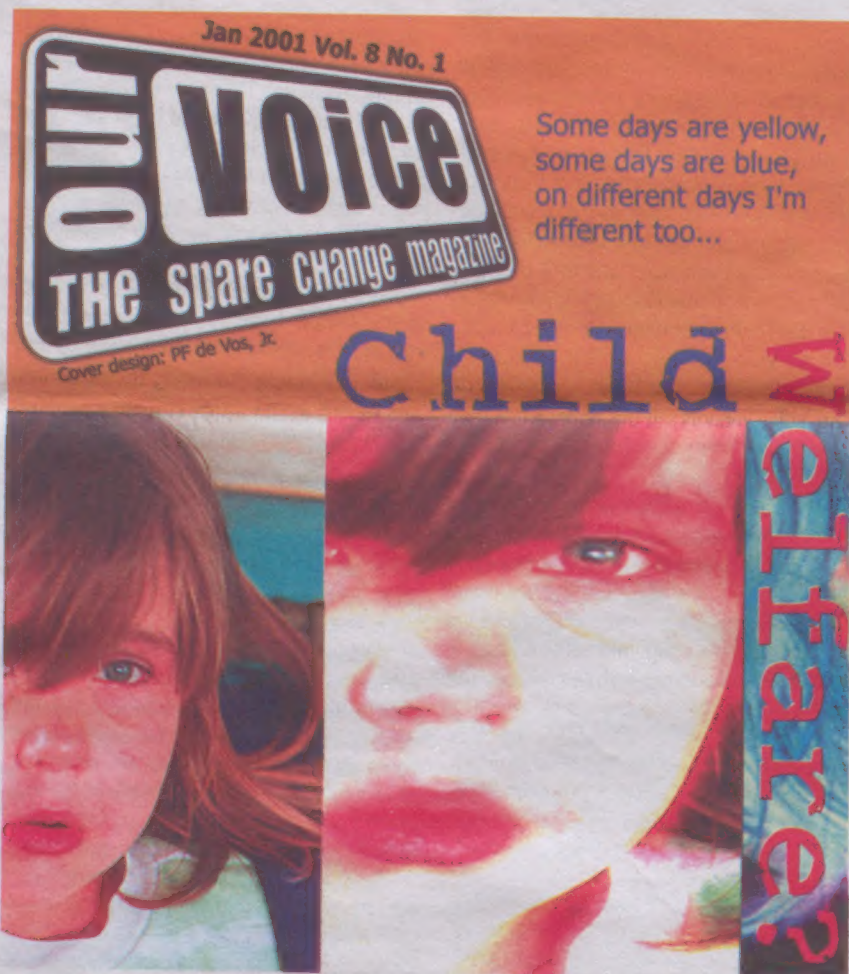
SCUTTLEBUTT

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Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?

A drinking fountain on a ship; A cask on a ship used to hold the day's supply of drinking water.

THE AMERICAN
HERITAGE DICTIONARY



Our Voice: A Retrospective

Our Voice, AKA, Spare Change, The Street Newspaper was conceived in a climate of dire necessity. In 1993 the Alberta Government began a series of cost-cutting measures. These

involved deep cuts to Social Services, Education and Health Care spending, ostensibly to knock back the provincial deficit. Intake workers at Social Services were instructed to deny benefits to any single male who in their estimation could work.

Suddenly, for the first time since the Dirty Thirties, the streets of Edmonton were full of panhandlers. Soon, women joined men on the streets, as the denial of benefits

was extended to single women and those whose children were more than six months old. This creation of a brand new underclass was hailed as a great success by the government in the mainstream media. There was a lot of boasting by the government about the 150,000 people who had been cut from the welfare rolls. The spectre of generational welfare dependence was banished. Of course, this sudden massive influx of desperate indigents onto the streets put a lot of additional pressure on those non-government agencies who traditionally had filled in the gaps between what Social Services was willing to provide and what people really needed to survive, a gap that had been getting wider and wider over the preceding decade.

Places like the Bissell Centre, which had started out as a United Church sponsored drop-in and soup kitchen were faced with the problem of what to do about people who were sleeping in dumpsters and on the riverbank. A good portion of these had spent many years of their life in institutions such as mental hospitals and prisons, and even if they had stopped substance abuse and other anti-social activity, they had no history or experience at all living in mainstream society.

The government's stated plan was to privatize Social Services by funding NGOs to repair these deficiencies. For an NGO to get these funds they, for the most part, had to agree to match government funding with dollars they solicited as charitable donations from caring individuals. The problem for people on the street was: it's all very well to learn how to do a job interview, however that doesn't solve the problem of a roof over your head and a place to shower before you go to the interview. Both government funding and charity dollars were being funneled into a thriving poverty

industry that did not address core issues such as housing and was not allowed by the terms of the grant structure to actually just give people money with which to survive. Hence, the panhandlers.

Some people reacted to this social change in proactive ways. Gordon Pocshwatta, a clever, young social entrepreneur, saw on a holiday to England poor people selling a publication called The Big Issue, which generated income for them and addressed the problems of those living in poverty. Returning to Canada he discovered that there was a similar publication in Vancouver called Spare Change. He saw the practicality of a project that actually put cash in poor people's pockets and promoted consciousness-raising in those who did not yet understand why there were suddenly beggars on the street.

In partnership with City Centre Church Corporation he designed a pilot project, which imported copies of Spare Change from Vancouver to sell in Edmonton. They were distributed from the Bissell Centre. The street guys loved the idea of being able to earn some money, and the buying public was so enthusiastic that Gordon and his partners decided to create an Edmonton version of Spare Change. He recruited Keith Wiley to do typing and layout. The Bissell Centre gave them use of the unfinished top floor of their new warehouse building to work in.

The stories came from the vendors. When they came in to buy papers, whoever was working distribution asked them to tell or write their story. On drifts of crumpled, stained loose-leaf paper the stories of blighted lives unfolded: stories of family abuse, alcoholism, residential school torture, prison. The hidden stories of the invisible people came to light. There were stark laconic accounts; there was despairing



OUR VOICE

SCUTTLEBUTT

poetry and everything in-between in handwriting that ranged from elegant script to scrawled capital letters.

The organizational form of the paper came from the vendors. They fought with each other for choice corners to work on, so a system of location tags was established to limit conflict. They used their money to buy alcohol and devalued the reputation of the paper by selling under the influence; so a non-drinking on the job policy was implemented. Some enterprising individuals bought more papers than they needed for themselves on Friday and sold the extra at a premium to other vendors who had run out over the weekend. An outside distributor was selected to serve these needs.

Public response was very enthusiastic. The Edmonton Spare Change, soon to be renamed *Our Voice* was booming with sales of 9,000 to 14,000 a month. Keith Wiley recruited Michael Walters, who was a young poet from the bowels of Alberta's oilfield with pink glasses and bleached hair, who had been hanging around the inner-city trying to understand its dynamic. Michael Walters, who grew up in poverty in Edmonton, was hired as the Distribution Coordinator to concentrate on cultivating content and to work day-to-day with the vendors and the distribution of *Our Voice* while Gordon managed the business end and Keith handled production. It was a learning process for everybody concerned. The vendors had to learn to get along with people and the *Our Voice* staff had to learn to see success in things like people staying housed.

In an attempt to replace the dwindling funds from the carefully husbanded original operating grant and pay for the production costs of an Edmonton edition, instead of just importing the Vancouver paper, *Our Voice* was forced to raise the cost of the paper to vendors from 5 cents to 60 cents. This had a terrible impact on vendor income. People who felt comfortable paying a loonie for a magazine purchased for a nickle suddenly did not feel comfortable paying that for something purchased at a higher price. Two dollars was too much, so they just stopped buying altogether. One vendor I spoke to at that time told me that it wasn't worth spending a day selling *Our Voice* anymore. When he could make \$60 a day he could support his family but he could not do that on the \$20-\$25 dollars a day he could make now.

On the other side of the equation, *Our*

Voice struggled with the same problems all private social programs face; the issue of sustainability. The editorial staff focused on the quality of the newspaper to encourage sales. Color emerged in a new tabloid format. But then a near disaster. The project tried for two issues a month. It almost put the paper under. It became very apparent there was not that much of a market in Edmonton. About the same time the original pilot grant was running out and City Centre Church Corporation withdrew its sponsorship. Bissell Centre took on *Our Voice* as a Bissell project. Executive Director Larry Derkach was very supportive of the venture and gave it almost complete autonomy within the Bissell system.

At the same time the cuts to Education funding, increases in the cost of Health Insurance and the looming threat of a two-tier medical system were diverting the public's attention away from the plight of the destitute. The middle class safety net was also fraying and people were becoming acutely aware of their own vulnerability. Vendors began to be verbally abused on street corners by individuals whose own sense of security had been threatened.

Temp agencies for day labor, which paid workers about half of what they charged clients, sprang up in grubby storefronts all over the inner-city. Bissell also created a casual labor program. Most of the more able unemployed bodies gravitated to these opportunities to earn \$60 a day in cash, leaving *Our Voice* with only those individuals who either felt a strong commitment to advocacy or who had disabilities too onerous even for the temp workforce.

In the face of rising costs of production, a shrinking workforce and a readership more worried about their own hide than that of the now familiar and socially accepted homeless, *Our Voice* strived to raise its profile by broadening its field of advocacy. Following the departure of Keith Wiley in 1998, Michael Walters hired a talented young photographer and graphic designer named Pieter de Vos for production. Natasha Laurence, an English major with strong personal commitment to the issues of marginalized people as Community Editor. *Our Voice* became a dynamic voice in the growing activist and protest movement, speaking out against government policies and world economic forces that were destroying the civil liberties and security of a wider and wider pop-

ulation demographic. Edmonton was host in the year 2000 to the annual North American Street Newspaper Conference. In 2001, *Our Voice* had people at the FIAA Protest in Quebec City.

Mike Walters left *Our Voice* to take a position with a local community organization and Natasha Laurence became Managing Editor, with Ron MacLellan in Distribution, until philosophical differences of opinion between her and the Bissell management caused her departure.

The present Managing Editor, Warren Bjarnason, a Journalism and Political Science graduate from the University of Victoria, gave the paper a fresh new look and a concentration on local as well as broader social issues. He encourages young students with a social conscience to make contributions to *Our Voice* to complement the writings by vendors and inner-city writers. Ron MacLellan takes care of promotions and distribution. Natasha Laurence, former editor, Linda Dumont, a long time contributor and vendor, and Cec Garfin, former outside distributor and unquenchable promoter of *Our Voice*, publish another street newspaper, the *Edmonton Street News*. *Our Voice* vendors sell this paper when they have sold papers to all their regular customers.

In ten years our world has changed a lot. There aren't as many panhandlers in the streets because the attitude of passersby has changed from concern to indifference to hatred. People are not concerned about the homeless people struggling with histories of trauma and mental illness anymore because now the working poor are also falling farther and farther into poverty. Police know that nobody cares anymore about the criminalized underclass. The working poor are going down the same road.

Temp agencies exploit laborers' need for a constant cash flow. Cheek by jowl with the shabby temp offices are "Payday Loan(sharks)" who charge unbelievably high interest and service charges for a little cash to make it between jobs. People with big bills with Telus resort to 33 cents a minute pay-as-you-go cells or get limited, expensive backdoor access through companies like Canada Reconnect.

With sky-high insurance rates more and more people are driving without car insurance. Prostitution, and the health issues around that, are open and common. Dope manufacture, sales and the consequent

bloody aftermath of some of these transactions become regular newscast fare. Family violence in economically-stressed households drive young people out into the drug culture in the street from which some will never return. All these activities victimize people in the community. There are other kinds of innocent victims. Seniors are losing the one asset that thirty years of work gained them; their paid-off house, simply because they cannot pay their heating bills. Women over fifty are the fastest-growing demographic of those seeking shelter in homeless hostels.

Did the people who applauded the government's "belt tightening" ten years ago envision a day when their mother might be losing her home because of high heating costs. That their son would be in jail, gaining a criminal record that will severely limit the jobs he can qualify for in the future, for driving an uninsured auto. Did it occur to them that they would have the responsibility of raising a second family, their daughter's young children? Ten years ago did they realize that they themselves were never going to be able to afford to retire? Did they think simply "throwing the burns in the streets" would satisfy corporate demand for cheap labour and reduce Government spending in any substantial way? Does anybody feel safe anymore? In ten years, the province has gone from a deficit to huge surpluses; this is hailed as a great victory. *Our Voice* keeps asking: victory for whom; has the price been worth it?

Dead people frozen in the alleyway are like the canaries that miners used to take down into the mines. They tell us that our society is toxic to people. How many dead canaries do we need? Our vendors do not make much money, not enough to live on. Most supplement other forms of income on a part-time basis. They do this because they believe that *Our Voice* can make a difference. In the Bissell organization, the *Our Voice* project is funded entirely from personal cash donations to the Centre. There is absolutely no funding from any government or social services-oriented foundation sharing the costs of this undertaking. Like Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Our Voice* vendors and newspaper alike depend upon "the kindness of strangers" to survive. Brother, can you spare a dime?

- Theresa McBryan

SCUTTLEBUTT

Like the office watercooler, the shipboard water barrel—the **scuttlebutt**—was a social meeting place and the center of shipboard gossip and rumor. So today the latest **scuttlebutt** is figuratively "the latest rumor." The word **scuttlebutt** is its figurative sense in all but Formal and Oratorical uses.

KENNETH G. WILSON



OUR VOICE

SCUTTLEBUTT

SCUTTLEBUTT



The Spare Change Debate

SCUTTLEBUTT: To engage in or spread gossip: blab, gossip, noise, rumor, talk, tattle, whisper.

ROGET'S THESAURUS

Gord and I had an argument. It went on and on, so I guess it was really a bit of a debate. We started up this new kind of publication, called Spare Change at the time, what should it be all about? Gord Poschwatta was the project manager and the initiating force behind the new project in 1994. He found and worked with the people who needed to make money by selling it, the vendors. He worked with the inner-city agencies and groups who could support the program. And he talked to the businesses and shopping malls, security guards and owners, to persuade them to give vendors a chance to sell. He hired me to edit the new street-sold magazine.

For Gord, it was clear, Our Voice was there to help the vendors and the goal was to make it easy to sell on the street, a newspaper of value that people would want to buy. We hammered out a two-part mission statement "...to provide an income opportunity to economically-marginalized people in our society while communicating about their issues to the public." That covered it. Gord wanted a magazine that would be easy to sell. My interest was to have some guts in it, some substance about the problems faced by our vendors and the community, and the causes of those problems. What about the people who live in poverty and are obliged to sell a magazine on a street corner to keep body and soul together?

We tried many different approaches: an astrology column, cartoons, an events calendar, a crossword puzzle and the stories about people struggling to survive. For Gord and I, the argument usually came down to what was on the cover. From my point of view, Gord wanted whatever would sell the magazine, even a sunshine girl on the cover. I didn't think another entertainment fluff publication would make it in a market already filled with this kind of thing. And so the debate raged on. Famous people, recognizable faces, shocking stories, empathy-engaging images...we tried them all. Gord had a very business-like approach to the project, and that included a dictum that every bit of work that went into the publication should

be paid for. We paid every writer and photographer, every vendor who submitted a small "word on the street", an honorarium. Usually it was about \$30, which was nothing to sneeze at for many vendors and contributors. It also turned out to be, to our surprise, close to the cutthroat market rate for freelance writing and art.

Whenever possible we published the work of vendors, and of the "inner city" community. It worked out well. The gritty, real-life stories of people facing hardships aren't something you find published everywhere. They can be very strong stories of heroic struggles, of painful tragedies and of the human spirit.

And, it turned out, that's what many Our Voice buyers liked, and was their reason to buy the magazine. But that's not all. We ran the risk of being repetitive bad news, and have been accused of "whining." Some of our fellow citizens said, "Oh, I've read that, and I don't want to read more of the same."

Gord Poschwatta put a great deal of himself into Our Voice. He had broadened the publication sales to other cities: Calgary, Saskatoon and Winnipeg, which helped to spread the cost of production and printing over a larger sales base. But it created a dilemma of making a publication relevant on the streets of many different cities. A year-and-a-half ago, Gord left Our Voice to pursue other ventures, and left a legacy of ideals for a project that can really help people.

But the debate about content, about what's most saleable for the vendors, and what's most relevant to their lives, still carries on. The answer, of course, as with any such debate, is a blend of approaches, something for everyone. The magazine should be appealing and interesting to new buyers and to people who have bought before. It can be loyal to the contributors and the community, which it supports, and include a wide range of upbeat stories. For me that's always been the challenge for this unique publication and I'm sure it will continue. (April, 1995)

- Keith Wiley

(Editor of OV from 1994 to 1998)

Free & Full Expression



Perhaps for myself, one of the greatest discoveries that came for writing for Our Voice was an introduction to a whole new world of artists. Creators of both prose and poetry who were not only overlooked by myself but the rest of the city as well, I gather. Some of them had no idea how talented they were or had never received any kind of support for their efforts.

Now I am not talking about the people and writers you will see here in the pages of this paper, that would be too obvious. I would like to inform you of those creative souls I would meet because of my association with the paper and while working on articles.

There was the street musician, Doug, whose battered guitar and case never seemed to collect enough loonies and dimes for a case of beer. Belting out Rolling Stones, Beatles tunes and the odd original song, Doug never thought of himself as a musician in any professional sense. Yet Doug made more money playing on the street than some of the city's original bands that play venues like the SideTrack or New City.

At the end of the nine to five day, Doug could be found in one of the downtown bars. There he would hold his busker's court with other street people discussing everything from politics and music to just where he was planning to sleep that night.

While researching an article on Bill 206 and prostitution I met a working girl whom I will call by the initials F.A. Once I placed her in front of my old Mac Computer she began composing poetry that impressed and moved me. It was a little rough, some of the spelling was poor and the division of lines convoluted, but there was talent that readily shone forth.

F.A., like many of the artists that exist on the street held a talent she rarely got to use, only because she never had a stable home or environment to work in. One of the poems she wrote, she gave me permission to edit and use as I saw fit. I reproduce it here as an example of what we as a society are missing because someone like her has no place to showcase herself if Our Voice didn't exist.

Poem Thingy

These feet are thine: I
these hands are bound,
my lips move
but there is no sound.
I'm lost inside these walls I've made,
trapped and cornered, I can't evade.

Can you hear me when I call?
Can you catch me when I fall?
I reach to you will you hold me?
Take my hand and then unfold me?

Love is something I've grown to hate,
it's not for me. I'm too late.

That's how it was when I saw you,
in the distance, you saw me too.
gave me a smile, that's when I knew.

I'm lost and scared of myself
when shown feelings, the true wealth.
Grab my hand and pull me up.
You are my life, you are my cup

I love you.

With a few words and having been given the opportunity, F.A. had given me more insight to the personal world of prostitution and homelessness than any article or news program had ever done. Example of true art. And she is just one example of a hidden world of creativity that remains untapped in our city. Just one more reason for Our Voice to celebrate its existence and what it does for our society.

I had seen this world before, had entered it unwillingly thanks to my battles with my own demons. My own personal Hades of schizophrenia has left me lost and homeless at times, as well. Without Our Voice I too might never have felt like picking up pen and sharing the ideas and stories that deserve another point of view than that given in other media. And so, I would like to say happy birthday Our Voice, and thank you for giving all of us a chance to express ourselves when no one else could give time and space to listen.

- Dave Dutton-Fraser

SCUTTLEBUTT



One Good Apple



SCUTTLEBUTT

S

Having a Voice

One night, a week-and-a-half ago, a man broke into my home. I woke up to the sound of footsteps moving across the living room floor above me. It was 2:30 in the morning and I had been sound asleep in my basement bedroom. My three children were sleeping on the main floor. As I lay there, terrified, the footsteps descended the basement stairs. Through the crack under the door I could see the beam of a flashlight moving through the darkness in the next room. I had no phone in my room and I knew that if I screamed no one would hear me except the stranger on the other side of the door. I remained silent. I remained silent as the door of my bedroom opened, the beam of the flashlight moving across the walls and floor. I remained silent while the intruder noticed I was there, told me not to move, left my room and went back upstairs. It was not until fifteen minutes later, when I was certain he had left the house, that I got up and called the police.

The man was not caught. What he stole from us was minimal and almost sad: my purse and cigarettes, two blocks of cheese and meat from the freezer. But the consequences to me are proving much greater than those losses. I now know the meaning of absolute vulnerability, helpless terror. More disturbing to me, though, and this is the thought that keeps coming back to me, is the fact that I remained silent. I did nothing to protect my children or myself. Unable to resolve that guilty powerlessness, the situation over and done, I find myself angry with people who mean me no harm. I defend myself unnecessarily against those I love and who love me, fighting enemies that do not exist.

It is only a little over a week since the robbery

and I feel confident that its effect on me will diminish with time and understanding. But I cannot help but think about so many of the people I spend my working day with, street people for whom safety is not an option. I begin to understand the aggressive looks, the "fuck-you" attitude, and the random, intense anger that overflows at a moments notice.

I also begin to understand, on more than a theoretical level, the importance of having a voice, the chance to defend yourself, to speak your reality and have someone care to listen to.

One of the challenges we face at Our Voice is to provide, both in the office and in the pages of this paper, a voice for people who are not used to being heard.

When those voices speak they are often angry or deeply sad. The stories they tell are not always easy to listen to. We are often told that the paper is too depressing, too full of doom and gloom. We struggle with these issues, voices that need to be heard and a culture that would prefer not to hear them. Allowing the voice of silenced people to be heard is one of the core reasons we exist. The other, to provide income for vendors, often seems at odds with this. It's hard to market people's pain and marginalization.

I am certain, in spite of the conflicts, we will continue to walk that thin line, listening to the stories, telling the stories, and attempting to raise the consciousness of our neighbors. To all our loyal readers and supporters, thank you for listening, and, please pass the word along. (October 2000)

- Natasha Laurence
(Editor of OV from 2001 to 2003)

In a world seemingly filled with corrupt politicians, greedy corporate executives, and annoying commercials telling us we desperately need the latest new SUV with a satellite dish on the roof, GPS systems, plasma screen TVs and pizza oven built into the dashboard, how can average people like you and me make a difference in the world? "All you have to do is look outside your door and see what's wrong," says Malcolm Azania, currently running as MP for the NDP in Old Strathcona.

"Some people think that being an activist means waving a big red banner, but the way you can really make a difference is by getting involved in your community," Azania continues. "Getting involved is about helping your local school get books, about working with your church to get services to people who are in need, about working with boys and girls clubs in the community. Democracy doesn't just end with voting. It starts there."

Okay, it's the time for true confessions. In the past, when I was a younger man with more hair and more interest in partying than politicians, I sometimes "forgot" to vote. It made me feel a little guilty, sure, but I was able to dismiss my oversight with an apathetic shrug, believing all politicians were hucksters anyway.

Sound familiar? If you're one of the many citizens of this truly privileged nation that believes every politician is a rotten apple, you might want to spend some time talking to Azania. A schoolteacher, a poet, a novelist, a social activist and a radio broadcaster for CJSR (under the moniker of "Minister Faust"), Azania feels so strongly about democracy that he's willing to do something neither I, nor you dear reader, will likely ever get the guts to do: entering the race to sit in the House of Commons as a Member of Parliament.

One of his great enemies is a disease. It's a bizarre but common mental disorder that robs many good citizens of the ability to partake in society, not because they can't but because this affliction convinces them that nothing they do matters anyway. That malady is called apathy.

"To people who are apathetic, I'd say they have been lied to for a very long time," says Azania. "The lie is that they can't control anything, that all parts of the world are out of their control. That's why they like mindless entertainment and content themselves with mind-numbing distractions." Like TV sitcoms? Like SUVs two inches higher than the kind Joe across the street bought last week?

Azania might not have a cure for apathy, but he has a challenge for all those who choose not to vote or merely do so with a shrug. "I think people like this are trying to be let off the hook. They say it's too hard to change the world, that there's nothing they

can do about things like climate change. That's not good enough," he says.

One of the biggest issues faced by people suffering from apathy is the image of the clichéd overbearing social activist screaming through a megaphone (made of biodegradable material, of course) that EVERYONE MUST MAKE AN ENORMOUS PARADIGM SHIFT NOW OR WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE!

"It's important you don't get overwhelmed," Azania says to me (and so many others like me who live in a constant downward spiral of complacency and guilt). "Don't feel that you need to change your whole life overnight. Make just one change a month. Drive less. Walk more. You'll feel better. Next month, make another change. After a while, you're doing a whole lot of things for the betterment of the world around you."

The greatest enemies of the socially conscious, however, are scads of businesspeople that only seem to care about their precious bottom line and politicians like Premier Ralph Klein who storm out of important media conferences like petulant children. How can we, as citizens, renew our faith in the fact that being a politician is a meaningful, even valiant, occupation?

"I don't want us to regain that faith," Azania counters. "What we need is a system that deserves to be believed in. That can only happen when ordinary folks are truly involved in the politics of their communities."

Part of Azania's platform as MP for the NDP in Old Strathcona is to build a greater, more vibrant sense of community. "One of my plans is to hold a Strathcona Social Forum at least once a year, over the weekend and in a school or some place where we can provide childcare," he says. The forum would allow citizens to get involved by participating in or hosting workshops of interest to the community.

As well, Azania plans to transform his constituency office into a resource centre to be used by everyone from school kids to senior citizens. The Strathcona Democracy Centre will provide constituents with information on environmental, labour and taxation issues as well as computer and photocopying resources for producing brochures and posters. It will also be a place to hold community events. "Most of us will not in our lifetime visit an MP's office," Azania notes. "I want to change that."

Azania wants to change a great deal of things. But then again, don't we all? Can we do it? Taking one step at a time, maybe we can. The important thing is to make that step, to do it today and keep doing it until we've exercised that old "apathy disease" right out of our skins.

- Mark Kozub

Like the office watercooler, the shipboard water barrel—the **scuttlebutt**—was a social meeting place and the center of shipboard gossip and rumor. So today, the latest **scuttlebutt** is figuratively "the latest rumor." The literal sense is Standard, as is its figurative sense in all but Formal and Oratorical uses

KENNETH G. WILSON

SUBVERSES

EVERYWHEN TO LIGHT

S SUBVERSES

Why do I fall to the past?
Images long gone haunt my heart;
While before me a continuous
and ever-changing
Radiance lies neglected, as if dirt.

The continuity of mind is
stretched tightly,
Shades the present in
hues of old things;
And that thin demon of
my own creation
Rekurs this fixation.

Intended or serving to
subvert, especially
intended to overthrow or
undermine an established
government:

Yet in a soft moment
When the membrane is slight,
The boundless freedom of the
future unwritten
Potents everywhen to light.

- JR Robertson

AN ANONYMOUS MAN

An anonymous man
died behind a liquor store
the temperatures a cold
and blustery -24
his name was Lloyd
his address was the street
all his life he had
been ostracized and beat
they say he didn't
have a fixed address
they also say he was
an alcoholic mess
imagine in such a
supposedly great city
a dies alone
we don't have any pity
more like Lloyd
today fall through the cracks
oh the compassion that
our affluent society lacks
we don't want to lend
any kind of helping hand
to the suffering like Lloyd
an anonymous man.

- Eric Anderson (Our Voice, July 2001)

FLIGHT

I saw two eagles in the sky
Beside the mountain.
Their flight was music,
Oboe and flute.

When I looked again,
They were not there.
There was only the sound
Of a piccolo in the air.

-JR Robertson

HE HEARS VOICES

He hears voices
of saints and sinners
sometimes they call
him a loser or winner
he hears voices
of God up above
sometimes he hates
sometimes he loves
he hears voices
of ones long departed
sometimes it leaves
him broken hearted
he hears voices
and they speak loud
sometimes he feels
as if his head's a crowd
he hears voices
often for a long time
especially on Sunday
when church bells chime
he hears voices
and that's his life
he's tried to end
his life with a knife
he hears voices
what more can he do
funny thing is that man
could be me or you.

- Eric Anderson (Our Voice, July 2001)

VENDOR REPUBLIC

A CARING SOCIETY FOR THE MENTALLY ILL

RCMP Corporal Jim Galloway has been laid to rest, killed by Martin Ostopovich, a paranoid schizophrenic who could not afford the \$300 per month for medication to control his delusions, which involved hatred of authority figures. Martin killed Corporal Galloway with a firearm that he was specifically permitted to own, by a judge who said his illness was under control. Martin died as a result of returned gunfire from other officers at the scene.

Our neglect of the mentally ill is seen on Edmonton streets and in our shelters for the homeless. Over 25 percent of persons in shelters clearly suffer from mental illness, many unable to make rational decisions concerning their welfare. Government must reconsider the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as to whether they should fully apply to those who are mentally incapable of addressing their own needs. Martin Ostopovich should not have had to pay for the drugs to control his schizophrenia and should have been monitored on a regular basis to ensure he was taking the medication. He should not have been permitted to own firearms and should have been institutionalized in the interest of his own health and safety and that of others if his medication was not controlling his seriously disturbing delusions.

My sincerest condolences to the family of Corporal Jim Galloway and the family of Martin Ostopovich.

It is said that the quality of any society is measured by its attitudes towards its weakest members. When it comes to safeguarding society and protecting the mentally ill from their own afflictions, I believe there is a crisis of quality in our society. What is your view?

- Peter Goldring,
Member of Parliament
Edmonton Centre-East

Wecan

While good nutrition is the cornerstone for building healthy bodies, for many families and individuals, having enough food to make it through the month is a challenge. The Wecan Food Basket, an Edmonton-based not-for-profit society, provides people the opportunity to access quality nutritious food at affordable prices. This is especially beneficial for those on fixed or limited incomes, but everybody is welcomed to use their services.

"We have a variety of customers," says Vereyken, Wecan's office coordinator. "Anybody can join. We especially have a lot of people in the inner city who use our service."

The society receives at least 450 orders per month for fresh, non-processed meat and produce, a figure that has been consistent since the society's inception. Despite Alberta's prominence in recent years as an economic powerhouse in Canada, she isn't surprised that people continue to take advantage of what Wecan has to offer.

"I think there are a lot of people who are doing the marginal jobs and have an income

that is not really that high," she says.

"The utilities have risen dramatically over the last couple of years and the rents have just about doubled. For many people, their incomes haven't gone up accordingly. We have the lowest minimum wage in the country and that doesn't go very far."

"There is a segment of our society that is poor and unable to generate a lot of funds," adds Madeleine Blanchette, who is Wecan's treasurer and has been a member of the society for two years.

"That includes people on AISH, those who are developmentally disabled, or through no fault of their own are unable to take care of themselves. Unless they have rich parents, they have very little to work with."

Blanchette, who is on social assistance and has a daughter on AISH, finds that using Wecan's services is a boon for her limited income.

"My budget is better enhanced because of this," says Blanchette, who purchases almost all of her meat at Wecan every month.

Wecan has more than 20 food depots located in Edmonton, which distributes a wide variety of food to needy families, who become members by paying an annual \$5 fee. Members can choose between an \$8 produce order of fruit and vegetables, a \$12 meat order or a combination package of meat, fruits and vegetables.

Produce might vary according to availability during the season, but the quality is always consistent. For example, a March combination order worth \$20 consisted of 800 grams of lean ground beef, a kilo each of pork chops and chicken thighs and a healthy quantity of oranges, apples, bananas, cauliflower, radishes, onions, lettuce and potatoes.

Wecan buys all the meat and produce at wholesale prices and pays grocers a 15 per cent charge for transportation from the warehouse to Wecan's sorting areas, where the meat is cut and the orders are put together.

Wecan is operated by a volunteer board, some of whom also donate their time to coordinate the efforts of getting food to their members. The society has 25 coordinators, while each depot is also run by handful of volunteers.

People requiring food from Wecan call the society's answering service. A volunteer collects the messages and responds to each caller to find their locations and put them in touch with a coordinator in a neighbourhood closest to them. Orders are placed during the first week of each month, with the food being collected and delivered by the third Thursday of that month.

Vereyken got the idea for Wecan more than 10 years ago, when she was a social worker based in Edmonton's inner city, where she heard more than her fair share of horror stories about schoolchildren constantly going hungry in class.

"Teachers would tell me that towards the end of the month, kids just wouldn't bother going home at lunch, because there was no food in the house," says Vereyken. "The teachers would be sharing their sandwiches, because the kids had nothing to eat."

Vereyken heard reports about food clubs operating in Toronto and Washington D.C. that provided low-cost produce to cash-strapped households. She got together with a number of community leaders to launch a similar initiative in Edmonton.

Aside from the freshness of the food, Vereyken believes the membership greatly benefits from the value Wecan delivers.

"Our members like the size of the orders," she says. "I'm always amazed when I take \$20 to the grocery store and look at how little I come out with, usually only about two bags of food," she says.

For more information on the Wecan Food Basket Society of Alberta, or to sign up to be a member, call 413-4525.



REPUBLIC **R**

No **republic** is more real than that of letters, and I am the last in principles, as I am the least in pretensions to any dictatorship in it.

THOMAS JEFFERSON

Our Voice vendors are now equipped with stylish *Our Voice* T-shirts.

Dress to impress with **Our Voice**.



VENDOR REPUBLIC

THE FOX'S DEN

R REPUBLIC

I despair of the Republic!
Such dreariness, such
whining sallow women,
such utter absence of the
amenities, such crass food,
crass manners, crass
landscape!!... What a horror
it is for a whole nation to be
developing without the
sense of beauty & eating
bananas for breakfast.

EDITH WHARTON



Living on AISH

Mike is twenty-nine years old and on AISH. This is his experience getting on assistance and then AISH.

Mike was first on Supports for Independence (SFI) starting in 2000. It was a terrible experience dealing with S.F.I. because he had just been diagnosed with schizophrenia. He had only been on medication the same time as he was applying for S.F.I. The benefits received were \$320.00 a month and he was living in a room and board set-up for \$400.00.

So, he was already behind the eight ball. About six months later, Mike has a home visit to inspect the lodging he was renting. Everything was aboveboard concerning the safety and cleanliness of the room. The problem escalated because the worker said that it wasn't a self-contained unit, although there was a door to enter and leave said unit. Then to Mike's utter surprise, he had to pay back \$1800.00 because he was living with his grandparents.

He appealed their decision to rescind the notice of repayment. Luckily, Mike got

accepted into the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (A.I.S.H.) Program. His appeal had been denied. They deducted \$50.00 a month from his cheque until the overpayment was repaid. Two hundred dollars a month was also paid from A.I.S.H. money already in the bank.

At the time of the application for S.F.I., Mike had no idea that paying rent to his grandparents would cause so much trouble. Then when he started receiving A.I.S.H., it was okay to stay living there. A.I.S.H. allows you to live with family members.

Mike is in group therapy at the U of A and sees his own doctor on a regular basis.

Good thing Mike has a lot of family support with his schizophrenia. He says, "I'd probably be dead". What's your take on people with schizophrenia that are not taking their medication? - They should comply with their doctor's orders and should have stable food, clothing and shelter.

The other person didn't show up for the interview. He is also on A.I.S.H., but sleeps in the river valley most of the time.

- Kevin Fox

Chrome Your Dome

The reasons I got my hair and beard clipped was that cancer has struck my uncle, my father and myself. In Nov - Dec 1999, I had a brush with cancer. On the morning of February 10/2003, before I was going for my yearly physical, I had a little accident. Like I said before in my columns, great people have been helping me through thick and thin. February 14, they removed two polyps from my bowel that were cancerous. I was back in hospital on my birthday in August to make sure they had removed these polyps

which came back negative.

In January 2004, a growth flared up under my left eye. It started a couple of years ago disguised as a beauty mark. I went to the Boyle MacCauley Clinic where the doctor gave me local freezing and took the growth out. It took three stitches to patch it up. Seemed like an eternity before I got the results back but the growth was benign.

Hairs off to all the participants who had their "Domes Chromed" for a worthy cause. To Kate Wyrstok, S.W.A.T. Coordinator (Social Wellness Awareness Team) and all members who volunteered or were part of the function, a really excellent job was done and done above and beyond their daily school classes.

The cafeteria was packed to the rafters and the atmosphere was electrifying beyond anyone's wildest imagination.

At this time, I'd like to give the community at large a huge THANK YOU for supporting a worthy cause.

To the people from every walk of life, an extra huge THANK YOU for filling out the pledge sheets. Cancer affects everyone. The battle is ongoing. Hopefully, with prayer, hope and research, cancer can be curable or at the very least, brought under control. May the Great Spirit hear us.

As a matter of interest, my sister Maureen had her beautiful blonde locks cut off for cancer in Fort Erie, Ontario. Neither one of us knew what the other was doing, Maureen found out when I sent her a clipping from the Grant MacEwan paper.

Now for a tally round up:

- On Feb 25/04 - \$12,000.00
- On Mar 2/04 - \$14,000.00

Final funds raised, over \$14,000.00

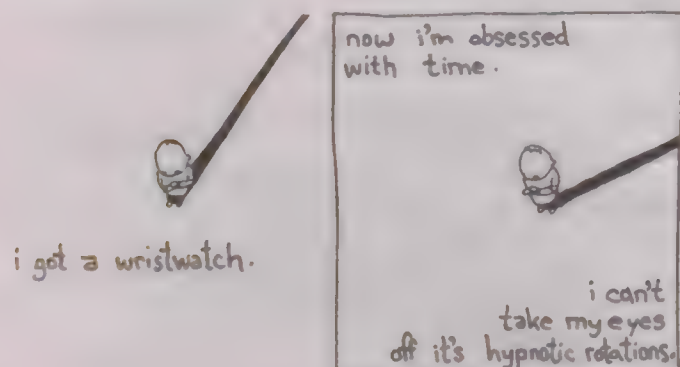
I'll be returning for this fundraiser next year!!

- Kevin Fox

On Fox
His berd as any
sowe or fox
was reed,
And therto
brood, as
though it were
a spade.
Upon the cop
right of his
nose he hade
A werte, and
theron stood a
toft of herys
Reed as the
brustles of a
sowes erys.
His nosethirles
blake were and
wyde.

- Geoffrey Chaucer

when the bough breaks • eric uhlich



ten years could go by and i will witness every single moment passing.



VENDOR REPUBLIC



S.W.A.T.

The last couple of issues, I have been writing about the Student Association clubs to promote their worthwhile projects. It's to enlighten the community at large that students at Grant MacEwan are socially conscious, politically active and knowledgeable about economic issues.

I have been politically active since I was eighteen years old. I was getting tired of hearing that no teenagers or young adults were involved in political agendas.

Never a dull moment around our house growing up. There was always some political figure, be it civic, provincial or federal members sitting around the kitchen table and on the social side, teachers and priests and people involved with unions and construction safety. Quite a few times I had to pull back and get the body and mind rejuvenated or you'd get overwhelmed. Stay focused and let the fire in your belly burn brightly for whatever projects you are involved with.

Steer Clear, for eight or ten years, was on campus focusing on issues concerning the pitfalls of drinking and driving. Over the past few years, Steer Clear started to branch out and become involved in social conscience and global issues affecting the community at large. With a name change, S.W.A.T. came out of Steer Clear.

S.W.A.T. tries to give passionate students the tools and assistance they need to present their ideas in an effective and educational manner. These campaigns are directed towards the students, faculty and staff.

A sample of S.W.A.T. campaigns include: Vegetarian Awareness Day, Thrash the FIAA Day (Free Trade Area of the Americas), Genetically Modified House of Horrors concerning G.M.O., Student Food Bank (fast for 30 hours for donations to the Food Bank).

Kate Wyrostok is the coordinator and has ten enthusiastic volunteers. The majority of volunteers are from City Centre Campus, while the rest are from the other campuses.

Kate is also part of Project H.O.P.E. (Hands Open to People Everywhere). Jamie helps but with the open door club and Ian was an active member of SCAW (Student Coalition Against War) last year.

With such varied groups, they are made up of full-time students. Most work part-time and volunteer in other groups outside of school.

With the completion of a student residence in 2005 and with degree-granting status under serious consideration, the student population at Grant MacEwan College is set to expand very quickly. S.W.A.T. will have a lot more interested students and potential volunteers and calls for projects very soon.

Congratulations to Kate for running and getting elected to the General Assembly. S.W.A.T. is just one of the many important SA groups at Grant MacEwan College. Your choices are varied to stay motivated and active.

- Kevin Fox

Poverty's Purse

On March 8, International Women's Day, \$2724.25 and 280 pounds of feminine hygiene products were donated to the Edmonton Food Bank. The money, pads and tampons were contributed at the Poverty's Purse Gala at City Hall.

The event included music by Daisy Blue Groff, a live auction by Nick Lees of the Edmonton Journal, and a fashion show by the Edmonton Oilers Ladies Association and social work students. The clothes were from three Whyte Avenue stores: Avenue Clothing Company, Modecor Limited and Nokomis Clothing. Hors d'oeuvres were made by Kids in the Hall.

The event was conceived and pulled together by two senior students from the Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary, at Edmonton, Briar McGinnis and Michelle Woytuik. They had toured the Food Bank's warehouse where they noted that there were few toiletries and no feminine hygiene products donated. They were told that the latter were the least donated item.

Seeing this as one instance of the feminization of poverty, the two women decided to do something about it. Partnered with the Food Bank, a core group of eight other students, and a number of volunteer contributors, they started work toward a small event. Despite classes, exams and practicums, the event grew.

It is estimated that over 200 people attended the gala. The \$2724.25 came from donations at the door and the auction. Every dollar donated to the Food Bank can be used to glean up to twenty dollars worth of products from local supermarkets. And there will be no empty space on the shelf marked "feminine hygiene products" in the toiletries aisle.

- Mary Bell

Would you like to tell your story to Edmonton?

Are there things that happened to you that you think negatively affect others as well?

Should other people know what's going on?

Send your story to

wbjarnason@bissellcentre.org

or come see the

Our Voice

editor at the

Bissell Centre,

10527 - 96th

Street.

Let your voice be heard!

REPUBLIC R

No **republic** is more real than that of letters, and I am the last in principles, as I am the least in pretensions to any dictatorship in it.

THOMAS JEFFERSON

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Indonesian Cuisine

水蓮素食餐廳



Congratulations *Our Voice*, on your 10th anniversary. Best wishes, from Padmanadi Vegetarian Restaurant



S SOOTHSAYER

Soothsayer. Beware the Ides of March. Caesar. He is a dreamer. Let us leave him. Pass.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



Aries (March 21st - April 19th)

The entrance of the sun into Aries marks the beginning of spring! If you're getting married later on this year, don't trouble yourself with what your horoscope says; you have enough to worry about. Getting worked up over some stranger's idea of what your future holds is never a good idea, especially when you're about to give up a share of the influence on that future to your partner. Love, be friends and be honest... let worry waste away.

Taurus (April 20th - May 20th)

Though your gruff exterior may belie the thoughtful lyricism of your interior life, you might still have a tough time convincing your superiors to direct your military service toward counter-terrorism in Joint Task Force-2. Perhaps you shouldn't be so quick to turn your back on the inheritance from your great-aunt, even if she stipulated in her will that you could only use it to open a clothing store for babies.



Gemini (May 21st - June 20th)

Gemini, your sign is associated with the lungs, shoulders, arms and hands and you're prone to lung problems and to accidents involving the arms. Now that winter is over, shovelling snow represents a miniscule threat to these parts. However, you should be mindful of the potential for injury when you're out working the bike or snapping the rust off your throwing arm.



Cancer (June 21st - July 22nd)

The entrance of the sun into each of the four signs of the cardinal quadruplicity signals the beginning of a new season. In this case, the beginning of summer is marked by the entrance of the sun into Cancer. Cancer is the most moody of all the signs of the zodiac and food represents emotional security to Cancerians. Sandy would like to offer some food for thought to all those folks, in recognition of your tendency to be cautious; the emotional security you derive from food now might be later undermined when the sun enters your sign and you try on your bathing suit for the first time.



Leo (July 23rd - August 22nd)

Just because you think something's supposed to make sense doesn't mean that it will. Having said that though, you bring your own sense to whatever you see or hear. Maybe it was Eliot or perhaps Joyce who responded to a reader asking if such-and-such was in his text, "If you saw it, it was there." Look for it, see it, and most importantly, believe it.



Virgo (August 23rd - September 22nd)

Be thorough when you wake up to record your eureka. Imagine the frustration of waking up in the morning and reading what you'd written in the middle of the night only to be confounded by something like this: "You know the thrill you get in finding something that you've been looking for for a long time? Spread that out and amplify it... you could get it if..."

Libra (September 23rd - October 22nd)

Milestone events in one's life - birthday, graduation, wedding, anniversary - can be a time for looking back and taking stock. Wayne Shorter of Weather Report articulated a good thought to keep in mind

when doing this. He said, "It's so elegant to be a human being - elegant meaning good fortune. We are very fortunate to be born as human beings. So if we realize that fortune, why not strive to be the most elegant in everything we do?" ("Elegant" in this sense meaning "ingeniously simple and pleasing".) Move forward with integrity, to help the less fortunate realize the good fortune that's rooted in our humanity.



Scorpio (October 23rd - November 21st) "Scorpios are best known for their sexual intensity", so this may put you in the position Scorpio, of having a number of liaisons to reflect upon when in repose. Remember Longfellow's words though, when choosing your special occasions to observe, "The holiest of all holidays are those kept by ourselves in silence and apart; the secret anniversaries of the heart."



Sagittarius (November 22nd - December 21st)

To those who would accuse Sandy of employing verbiage, understand that these prognostications are conceived advisedly not to show off but rather - among other things - to catch up those punctilious sesquipedalian Sagittarian word-grubbers who would publicly, loudly and persistently express outrage after reading here that this month, they might expect to have their dismay overturned while indulging their lubricity with paraphilemia and finding that, contrary to initial impressions, their preference for alopecic paramours has not been foiled but merely temporarily suspended by a merkin. (In other words, it's done to have fun. Relax.)



Capricorn (December 22nd - January 19th)

You Capricorn, on the other hand, typically view pleasure seeking as an idle waste of time. Sandy figures that that predisposes you to admire the street newspaper vendor, who foregoes pleasure seeking to work long hours for modest compensation. Show him or her your admiration.



Aquarius (January 20th - February 18th)

April 13th was a day of birthing for great men. Al Green was one of those men. If you're like Sandy and are excited by the prospect of seeing this legendary performer here in Edmonton, bring a friend to share the magic. I know you got soul Aquarius because, as Bobby Byrd sang, "if you didn't the music wouldn't groove ya." The future might see you and your pals performing under a name lifted from the mythology of a fictional band.



Pisces (February 19th - March 20th)

Whether you buy it to support your friendly neighbourhood vendor, or if it's for the personal stories or even the academic psy-phi-linguistics contained therein, you the reader are to be commended for buying Our Voice. Your support identifies you as somebody who, like a Piscean, "can be a loving, compassionate person who may often attempt to transcend life through an ethereal art form." Pisces is the last sign of the zodiac. As the cycle continues, and as Our Voice embarks on another decade of program service, Sandy would ask you to focus on one of your emotional keywords - "devotion" - to secure your continued support for street-paper vendors. Thank you.

Summer Programs at Moonlight Bay Centre

What are YOU doing with your summer?

*"This summer's staff was one of the best that I've ever been part of."
(Summer 2003 staff)*

- ▶ A supportive, fun, and tight-knit team environment on Lake Wabamun
- ▶ A chance to further develop your skills and knowledge
- ▶ A meaningful opportunity to work in a key inner-city agency (Bissell Centre)
- ▶ A comprehensive week-long training session
- ▶ Access to camp recreation facilities and equipment
- ▶ Room and board in a comfortable cabin situated in a natural setting

"I learned so much..." (Summer 2003 staff)

Seeking promising students (18 years+) and non-students for a range of positions, including program staff, waterfront staff, assistant manager, caretakers, and cooks. Not yet 18? Check out the Moonlight Bay Volunteer Leadership Program!

*"It has been an honor and a pleasure to work at Moonlight Bay this summer."
(Summer 2003 staff)*

For more information, see postings at U of A, GMCC, and Earth's General Store, or contact Kathryn Rambow (Manager of Moonlight Bay Centre) at krambow@bissellcentre.org

Performers Wanted!

Family Entertainment Night (Coffee House)

Open Stage! Live Music!
Light Supper! Poetry Reading!

DOOR PRIZES!!

Tuesday, April 20th

Supper 6 PM
Music at 7 PM

Bissell Centre

10527 - 96 St.
Contact: Earl @ 423-2285 ext. 144

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For the Inner City

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- ▶ Life Management Skills Training
- ▶ Career Counseling
- ▶ Résumé & Cover Letter Preparation
- ▶ Job Interview Skills
- ▶ Internet Training
- ▶ H2S Training (limited funding available)
- ▶ WHMIS/Standard First Aid Training

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CASUAL LABOUR

"Pay the worker –
NOT the broker"

Minimum hourly rate - \$8.00
Minimum 4 hours per day

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Bookings taken within work hours
Mon-Thurs: 7am-2pm
Fri: 7am-noon

Need someone to help with...

- ▶ Yard Work/Snow Removal
- ▶ Loading/Unloading
- ▶ Decorating – internal/external
- ▶ Cleaning – domestic/industrial
- ▶ Manufacturing
- ▶ General Labour

All services offered at no cost!

BISSELL CENTRE

Telephone: 424-4385

Or

Casual Labour program for women at
Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton
Telephone: 421-1175 ext 22
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ARE OPEN SEVEN
DAYS A WEEK



Urban Exposure

IMAGES FROM THE PERIPHERY OUR VOICE 2004 CALENDAR



A city has values as well as slums, excitement as well as conflict ... a personality that has not yet been obliterated by its highways and gas stations.

- Charles Abrams

Replacements Available for Our Voice 2004 Calendar

Please note that the months of June, November & December of the *Our Voice Urban Exposure* Calendar contain printing errors.

Replacement calendars are now available from *Our Voice*.

For more information, please contact Ron at:
423-2285 Ext. 139.

We apologize for the inconvenience.